

# BANDWAGON

THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

MAY-JUNE 2000

THE FRANK A. ROBBINS  
INCORPORATED

NEW AND  
GREATEST  
ALL  
FEATURE  
SHOWS

THE BEST  
OF EVERYTHING  
AND  
NOTHING BUT  
THE BEST.  
ALL NEW  
THIS SEASON



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## THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

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MAY-JUNE 2000

**FRED D. PFENING, JR. EDITOR AND PUBLISHER**

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### THE FRONT COVER

A history of the Frank A. Robbins Circus begins in this issue.

The lithograph of the Robbins show on the cover was used in the early 1900s. It is one of the finest posters designed by the Erie Litho Company. The original in the Circus World Museum collection.

### NEW MEMBERS

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### ADDRESS CORRECTIONS

A number of problems in the mailing list have occurred in recent months. The problems were caused by the mailing service and not by the Secretary-Treasurer. We have moved our mailing to another company.

Extensive corrections have been made to our mailing list. Please double check the address and spelling on your envelope to make sure it is correct.

### ORIN COPPLE KING

Circus Historical Society Trustee Emeritus Orin King died on April 17, 2000 in Topeka, Kansas.

A long time member of the CHS, King contributed a massive amount of circus history to the *Bandwagon*. His "Only Big Show Coming" appeared in the *Bandwagon* for many years. He was also the author of a biography of Willie Sells.

In 1940 he began working for the War Department and served as a civilian secretary to General George Marshall, turning Marshall's brief hand written notes into written orders. He became concerned about the secrecy of his position and frequent FBI security checks. He resigned and joined the Army, but was discharged for health reasons. He then taught military English to Air Force trainees at Chillicothe, Missouri. He then was in charge of

Air Force supply and refueling in Topeka.

Following the war King became a professional photographer in Topeka. In his later years he worked for a photography store in Topeka. The Wolfe Camera shop sponsored his circus research in preparation for his extensive writing of the history of the circus in Kansas.

King's contribution to circus history placed him with a few others among the top circus authors in the United States.

Orin King will be sadly missed by our organization.

### ADDRESS CHANGES

*Bandwagons* with wrong addresses are returned at a cost of \$1.65 postage due. Please advise the editor in advance of your move. These issues can not be replaced at no charge.

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DEALER AND CLUB INQUIRIES INVITED



# FRANK A. ROBBINS

## a most successful failure

### PART ONE

By Robert Sabia

What do the following circus men have in common? W. C. Coup, Joseph T. McCaddon, Floyd King, Jess Adkins, George Christy, Lucio Cristiani, Clyde Beatty, Tim McCoy, Howard Bary, Rhoda Royal and Frank A. Robbins? The answer is straight forward. All were highly successful either as circus executives or performers. In those capacities, they all contributed greatly to the financial wherewithal of the owners for whom they worked. Almost all were very respected in the circus business.

None could be described in any measure as a dilettante such as Dode Fisk and his ilk. And, oh yes, they all ultimately failed as circus owners. The lesson here is simply that the circus business is just about the most difficult one a person can pursue, particularly in the days gone by. It took far more than sound business sense, hard work, and attention to detail. Showmen had to be ever vigilant to keep employees in a position to steal from doing so. They had to be focused on the economic conditions along the route, be aware of the ever changing tastes of the public and be promptly responsive thereto, and be financial wizards (not many rail moves were ever granted on credit), all while keeping together a circus troupe often consisting of prima donna performers, inveterate sharpies, high turnover laborers, and besotted department heads.

If the foregoing wasn't enough of a challenge, there were other obstacles: weather, economic downturns, dishonest town officials, irresponsible railroads, archaic laws and statutes, wrecks, deaths, injuries, religious pressures, stampeding elephants, and the reputation of preceding circuses. Who needs it? For every W. W.

Cole, there were a number of W. C. Coups; for every James A. Bailey, there were a host of J. T. McCaddons; for every Charles Sparks, there was a lineup of Floyd Kings; and for every Burr Robbins, there was a plethora of Frank A. Robbins.

On second thought, there was never a plethora of Frank A. Robbins—there was just one—and his story certainly bears this out. He was a man whose ambitions knew no limits and who was creative in performance presentations. He was way ahead of his time in the utilization of women in key positions. He was highly regarded in the business and was universally liked and appreciated by his peers.

Frank A. Robbins, born June 15, 1856, died October 13, 1920. Pfening Archives.



ed by his peers. His initiative took his show to the greatest city in America within seven short years as an owner. He lost his show at least a half dozen times and rebounded each time. He was the very personification of the hard-working, focused, knowledgeable, imaginative, respected and persevering business executive. Notwithstanding all of these characteristics, Frank A. Robbins was a failure in his career objective: to own and maintain a financially successful circus. Nobody said life was fair, but then Robbins wasn't one to complain. He was the consummate doer and do he did, and he did so for a longer time than any of the aforementioned doomed circus owners. In my mind, he was clearly the most successful failure of them all.

Edinburg is a small farming community of about 2,000, about 30 miles south of the state capital of Indiana, Indianapolis. On June 15, 1856, (often wrongly cited as 1854), Frank A. Robbins became the first born of the local druggist, Frank Robbins and his wife, Anna (nee Hart). Following Frank A., there were two other sons, Charles and Oran, and a daughter, Marjory. Nothing useful is known to this writer regarding Robbins' and his siblings' childhoods. He later joked about his druggist father's standard remedies, viz.: "Salts and Senega" for internal ailments, and "Arnica" for external maladies. Regarding the internal medicines, apparently he believed that a highly effective solution to patients' distress was to create movement from any available orifice. Such a comment by Robbins indicates that he had some familiarity



with his father's business as a result of working as a clerk in the store, and from this recollection it didn't appear to evoke unpleasant memories. It should be noted that he had very strong family ties to his siblings and progeny, most of whom participated to some degree in his show business endeavors, another indication of a satisfactory home life as a child.

How or when Robbins was exposed to the circus is not known. However, after the Civil War ended, there were a number of small and large shows plying the Midwest. Certainly nearby Indianapolis saw its share of the larger circuses and if such shows captivated the mind of the young Robbins, it was a fairly easily trip over relatively flat terrain to see them. In any event, according to Robbins, he joined the Hemming, Cooper & Whitby Show on June 23, 1870. Robbins had just turned fourteen, not a particularly young age at that time for a mature teenager to be on his own. He later observed that James A. Bailey was the general agent of the show that year. During 1870, Bailey was half owner of the concert privilege. Whether he met Bailey at that time can only be conjectured, but Robbins being the ambitious person he was, it wouldn't be surprising. It could be that he sold his wares during the very concert that Bailey partially controlled and may have been working for him. Bailey started his circus career but ten years earlier on the advance team of the Robinson and Lake Show at the very tender age of thirteen, so he was still a young but highly experienced and ambitious twenty-three. Bailey was only the first of many circus owners and executives with whom Robbins maintained a meaningful relationship throughout his circus life.

Although it is not clear, Robbins probably stayed with the Hemmings and Cooper Show, Whitby being killed by a ruffian late in the 1870 season, during the 1871 season, again as a butcher. For the 1872 and 1873 seasons, he probably was with the George F. Bailey show. In 1874, he was with the Warner, Henderson & Springer Show (Mr. Henderson dying shortly after the season's close). He was with the Melville,



Maginley & Cooke circus in 1875. Then came the big time--P. T. Barnum in 1876. In the *Billboard* of March 19, 1910, Robbins made some observations of the 1876 Barnum show, evidencing the awareness of an individual who intended to make a lifelong career in the business. He noted that this was his first experience with a railer and in comparison to his exposure to the wagon shows, the Barnum Show "seemed a gigantic affair, and it was. . . [I]t required forty-five cars to transport the people and paraphernalia, but as the stocks and flats were but thirty-two feet long and 20,000 lb. capacity and the sleepers forty and fifty feet in length, it was about the size of a twenty car show of to-day. The circus canvas was a 150 ft. round top with one 50 ft. middle piece, one ring, 15 tier blue seats, 13 tier red extras. . . One can readily see that they could take care of as many people as a show of to-day with a 150 ft. round top and three 50 ft. middle pieces, as the space used for the two rings, stage and race track would use up the seating capacity afforded by the two extra middle pieces." That year, Robbins was the "director-general of a candy stand in the center of the museum."

In the same article, he compared the Barnum show with the 34 car 1879 Forepaugh circus on which he was the purveyor of animal booklets at the entrance to the menagerie. He noted that the rail cars were 40 footers, especially built for the show. The menagerie tent was a narrow 60 foot round top with six 30 foot middles. Robbins stated that "as Mr. Forepaugh never allowed anything in the center it certainly looked very long and the people upon entering would exclaim, 'Why it's longer than Barnum's.'"

"Our answer to all inquiries, 'Which way to the circus?' was 'Go straight ahead three quarters of a mile and turn to the left.' Forepaugh was a fixture at the front gate, a few

feet away from the entrance of the menagerie, keeping his keen eye on all the happenings about him. He undoubtedly observed the aggressive Robbins hawking his booklets. Contemporaries said Robbins was a protégé of Adam Forepaugh.

After the Barnum circus Centennial season, Robbins was on the Van Amburgh show in 1877. He was back again on the Barnum circus in 1878 which was still managed by the Flatfoots. In the *Billboard*, Robbins stated that he was on the Van Amburgh Show in 1879 which may be in error as he previously stated he was on the Forepaugh show that year which was confirmed by another source. He could have been on both. Finally, in 1880, he went into business for himself, buying the privileges on the Pullman & Hamilton Circus. Although the show was reputed to have a poor year, it undoubtedly provided Robbins with invaluable experience in managing the privileges, an important circus activity, particularly during a stressful financial season. There would be many other such seasons.

It may have been in 1876 when the Barnum show played Utica, New York on September 4, or more likely, at an earlier time and place, Robbins met Frances (Fanny) Herendeen of Newport, New York. Miss Herendeen was about two years younger than him and may have been a student at a local normal school pursuing a teaching career. Newport was a village about fifteen miles north of Herkimer which was a robust town on the busy Mohawk River which was a link on the Erie Canal. It was generally a farming area, populated by successful growers of hops and dairy crops, although the very important Remington Arms company was located in nearby Ilion. The 1870 and 1880 censuses set forth the net worth of each head of household. Many of the local farmers and businessmen had significant net worth and that sum was not totally reflective of the value of the house and land. Miss Herendeen lived with her mother, a younger sister at the home of her grandfather, Lyman Lawton. While Lawton's net worth was not particularly impressive, he apparently had many skills and occu-



pations. He was described at various times as a mason, a mechanic and a teamster. Robbins and Miss Herenden followed their hearts in matrimony on September 16, 1876 in Utica, and began begetting. Charles was born on January 24, 1878, and Frank Jr. on March 7, 1882. It is believed that in between a daughter was born who died at an early age. It appears that Robbins moved into the home of Lyman Lawton at the outset of the marriage and returned there for the off season. This made sense as there is no evidence that Fanny ever traveled with her husband during the circus season, at least for any extended period. Knowing the conditions offered employees of the circus at the time, what sane young lady from a genteel background would ever want to become part of the troupe? The fact that she seldom, if ever, traveled for a long duration with the show may have contributed to the demise of their marriage in 1894. It had repercussions to Robbins and his sons long after.

And there we have it—the onset of 1881 reveals a young man of twenty-four with at least one child in addition to a wife of twenty-two; a bright man who is hard working, with a practical circus background, and with a future that had no limit. What was a person to do but to own a circus? How one goes about that without any meaningful bankroll is only a small challenge to a person with a vision. It didn't seem to be a major obstacle to Robbins. One just starts small and heads directly toward the light at the end of the tent, even if it is only a flicker. Robbins did just that to the wonderment of many in the circus world.

Have you ever noticed that the smaller the show, the more grandiose the title? Robbins' first venture into title creation was not as elaborate as some but took a back seat to no one. The Great Metropolitan Allied Shows had a nice rhythm to it and it certainly communicated the notion of bigness. Not a bad idea because viewing the show's property, bigness was a word that didn't readily come to mind unless a lengthy column of five dilapidated wagons from a

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And a famous European Cast of Characters, Superior Wardrobe, Mechanical Appliances and Scenic Effects.

Prof. Shelman's  
**GREATEST DOGS IN EXISTENCE!**

An 1881 Frank A. Robbins newspaper ad. Author's collection.

defunct stage line, which had hauled both freight and folks, augmented by a contrived tally-ho wagon, impressed a local whose sole point of reference was seeing some other column of three equally dilapidated wagons without a similar tally-ho. It was and is all a matter of perspective. The tally-ho served as the bandwagon, ticket wagon and the conveyer of performers from town to town.

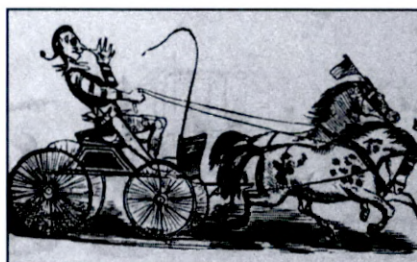
Robbins said that he gave the lemonade privileges to Professor Shedman who had the dog act to provide him with sufficient fortitude and encouragement to join this band of merry men and women. He promised a percentage of the huge anticipated profits to William Leonard predicated on him also joining the show with two performing ponies, two horses and a wagon for billing. Robbins also allegedly promised shares in the profits to other performers. Eventually, the parallel to Joe Louis aside, he had to deal in actual cash and he paid \$115 for two more horses and harnesses for the draft horses. In addition, he also provided a fair amount of sweat equity in terms of poles, stakes etc.

All of the foregoing resulted in a circus ready to embark on a journey that did not end for thirty-five years. On May 6, 1881 (a local newspaper said Saturday May 7), in Newport, New York, Robbins did what he set out to do just a few months prior, introducing his circus to the world for its enjoyment. It is important to note that from the beginning, he structured his show on four basic tenets from which he seldom deviated. First and foremost, he had a very strong performance, innovative and complete as finances allowed, thereby permitting the repeating of stands many times, often in consecutive years. Second, he hired professional management, performing and working staffs who could interface with the press, local officials, and customers with courtesy and competence. Third, he had a powerful advertising program that caused the locals to bristle with excitement in anticipation of the show's arrival while warding off the omnipresent competition from such shows as Van Amburgh, Circus Royale, Shelby, Pullman & Hamilton, Sells, W. C. Coup, John Murray, and Batcheller and Doris, amongst others. Fourth (and I believe totally inconsistent with the other three tenets), he apparently encouraged and probably participated in gambling, short changing of all kinds, and ticket switching. You name it; he had it in all of its variants. These sharp practices could be turned off in a moment in locations where Robbins did not



want them to take place. These activities were in keeping with the times, particularly in the 19th century, but they were never far absent well into the 1910's. We are constantly bombarded by afternotices that compliment the show in all regards, yet lambasting it for its foul practices. These practices were also in contrast to circus executives who Robbins held in the highest esteem for their honesty and professionalism. Specifically identified by Robbins as being part of this outstanding group of circus executives were those to whom he was exposed during his formative years (1870-1880). They included James Cooper, Richard Hemmings, George F. Bailey, Avery Smith, Lewis June, John J. Nathans, Hyatt Frost, O. J. Ferguson, and J. E. Warner. Of course, it may be that there were two prevailing dictums regarding honesty and integrity, one as it applied to those in the circus community and business/professional relationships, and quite another as it applied to the general public (customers). There is no question that Robbins paid his bills promptly (when possible), was always proper in his decorum, and was an honored member of circusdom throughout his entire circus career, notwithstanding his financial well being at the time.

Fleshing out the program for the 1881 season is a matter of compiling bits and pieces of information mainly from ads and a few afternotices. Virtually nothing specific about the show was published in the *New York Clipper*. It is reasonable to presume that Robbins modified his program from time to time as the season progressed. Indeed some of the following may have joined after the season began. We know that Sam Lent acted as a contracting agent. We also know that Professor Bert Waterman led the band. Show ads indicated that in addition to George Shedman's dogs and William Leonard's ponies, the Shedman Brothers (acrobats), Charles and George Gregory (horizontal bar), Will Gaylord (contortionist), James Milo, Mademoiselle Delia Gregory, Carrietta Kemp (globe walker), Gennaro Marranzum, Alice Maurice, T. Read, Dave Williams, John Mack, Frank Woodruff and Wallace Grant performed their spe-



cialties in the arena. All in all this seems like a very healthy cast for a show so small, and it probably was somewhat exaggerated by listing turnover personnel. The show featured a clown act entitled, Humpty Dumpty, which reviewers' disliked. The tally-ho was appointed a "Royal Tally-Ho" and so designated, made a daily trip downtown at 10 a. m. for a "Grand Parade Concert."

So confident and perhaps sensitive was Robbins regarding his performance, his newspaper ads frequently carried the following promise: "I will forfeit \$1,000 if the arena of the Great Metropolitan does not contain absolutely more fresh and startling novelties than any other show in America. We offer no played-out, swindling, mountebank march of cheaply daubed wagons, tinsel and trash to gull the public and entice them into empty canvas: but we do give all we advertise, and more, too—and more for the money than any other show on earth. Frank A. Robbins." Strong stuff. One can only wonder how many times he had to pay off on this guarantee.

Northwest of Albany and northeast of Newport is approximately 7,000 square miles of very rugged terrain known as the Adirondack Mountains. Lake Placid of Olympic fame is located within. There are few pockets of population. Robbins' initial route circumnavigated the Adirondacks, going north from Newport, reaching villages almost on Lake Ontario practically to the Canadian border, then heading east to Lake Champlain. The show headed south a hundred or so miles before cutting southwest across the southern third of the Adirondacks before entering the Mohawk Valley of James Fedimore Cooper's writings. This route of 350 miles as the crow flies (probably twice as much in actuality) was accomplished in about 40 days. Given the remoteness of the

area, often traversing great hills and deep valleys, and the primitive road network, it must have been a grueling experience on both man and beast. This strain must have been amplified at the outset of the season because frequently in Northern New York, freezing weather is not uncommon during the nights. The first newspaper comments were set forth on the same date and same page in the Lowville paper; from Glendale on May 13, the reporter stated "The Great Allied Circus has come and gone. As usual they got a big crowd. But this did not exactly satisfy them as they wanted 10c extra for seats, and 10c extra for the old 'Lather and Shave' trick, which was contrary to their advertisement." It started already. Lowville on May 14 commented that it "was not much on parade but inside the tent, the show was fully up to the average of circus performances. The performers did well, and what is rare in show business, there were no rowdies among them all." In Copenhagen on May 16 rain overtook the show, holding down attendance.

At Chateaugay on June 1, it was observed that the circus had no street parade. Although the audience was not exposed to a performance that was equal to more pretentious shows such as Barnum's, it was worth the price of admission. It noted that one thing was certain, "a better and more gentlemanly company of showmen never visited this town." The show was at Plattsburg on Saturday, June 4, and then headed south picking up Keeseville, Au Sable Forks, Elizabethtown, Port Henry, and Ticonderoga (the latter two villages on Lake Champlain were made famous by the Green Mountain Boys during the Revolutionary War) en route to the Mohawk Valley at Mayfield on June 20. The Mayfield reporter stated that on "Monday of this week a circus or something similar, exhibited at Mayfield. All the mountaineers (Adirondacks) were down to see it. All kind of conveyances were utilized and it would have made your sides ache [with laughter?] to see the collection of people. The performances outside the tent were very fine: some tumbling [the Gregory Brothers?]



was done that would have astonished an expert. . . . The music inside the tent was not by Tislington, no, not by a considerable. The whole affair was a mixture of good, bad and indifferent, the two last elements predominant." The next day Gloversville had a similar reaction to the troupe. It said that the "performance was, as our Mayfield correspondent says, a 'mixture of good, bad and indifferent.' The opening pantomime [Humpty-Dumpty] was a most heart-rending affair, but was fairly counterbalanced by some good performance in tumbling, contortion [Gaylord?], bar [Gregory Bros.?], slack wire [Mme. Gregory?] and trapeze feats. The trick horses and dogs were very amusing." All in all, it was a very good afternotice. At Johnstown on June 21 as "some one has said, it was 'good, bad and indifferent' [Everyone must have read the same newspaper]. Seldom is there any better balancing performed by any company. We do not recollect of having anything more wretched than their Humpty Dumpty while the remainder of the show was fair. They had a good house." Notwithstanding a very substantial and impressive ad at Schoharie on July 1 which again stressed the irrepressible "Humpty Dumpty with THREE GREAT CLOWNS, and a famous European cast of Characters, superb wardrobe, mechanical appliances and scenic effects," the show played to small crowds. An article placed by the show mentioned a Professor Phillips walking the high wire from the ground to the top of the center pole of canvas at 1 p. m. as a grand free exposition. A 25 cent admission was charged.

The show now headed southeast, probably crossing the Hudson near Hudson, New York. It played Millerton, New York on July 11, and Falls Village on July 12 in the northwest corner of Connecticut before entering Massachusetts at Sheffield on July 13. It continued north along the western border of Massachusetts. Of special interest, in the July 16 *Clipper* was the first ad wanting "Performing horses and Ponies and trick mule." The permanent address set forth was Frank A. Robbins, 158 E. 27th St., New York City. The New



York City address commands attention as it was the first known connection between Robbins and New York City where he located his business offices for much of his career. His ad may merely reflect an address of a business friend or a mail drop.

Continuing to head north, the show played Petersburg, New York (about 10 miles from the Massachusetts border) on July 20. At Cambridge, New York on July 22 admission was 35 cents. The after-notice related that the "Metropolitan Allied Show did not quite live up to all their bills promised, but after all was a very fair variety show and came about as near to the advertisements as traveling circuses ordinarily do. The tent was well filled in the afternoon by children, accompanied by parents or guardians, and in the evening the performance was fairly well patronized."

In the July *Clipper*, Robbins placed an ad for musicians. He wanted a clarinet and 2nd violin for the orchestra, and a trombone, tenor and alto for the brass band. He also solicited candidates for a song and dance position who could do two turns in the concert, and could tumble. His address at this time was per the route.

Ever northward in relatively short hops, the show was at Salem, New York on July 23, business was good at both afternoon and evening performances and the show "had a good moral effect on our community, for the usual midnight matinee did not come off." On Monday, July 25, the few residents of West Hebron witnessed a "very good" performance because of the heavy rain. On the following day at Aroyle, small audiences at both performances saw "a very thin" show. The reviewer at Schuylerville, about 30 miles north of Albany, on July 27 was even more negative when he opined that it "was a ramshackle, broken winded, one-

horse affair, that hadn't enough to get up a street parade." The Great Metropolitan Show was the first in Schuylerville in four years. After an over 20 mile overnight haul to Ballston, the admission fee was 35 cents for adults and 25 cents for children. Ballston was in a summer resort area which may have justified the higher ducat prices. A series of long hauls through Galway on July 29 took the circus back into the Mohawk River Valley at Canajoharie on August 1, Fort Plain on August 2 and Springfield Centre on August 3. This area was prime circus territory, and had been already visited by a number of shows including large ones such as Sells, Forepaugh, and Coup. The folks from Canajoharie were pleased by the pantomime, clown, tumblers and trick horses, they being described as "immense." Although unpretentious, it was thought to be a good show.

Similar accolades emanated from Fort Plains. The Fort Plainers thought that the show "more completely 'filled the bill' than many of the larger tent-shows. The acrobatic portion of the program was particularly excellent." Continuing west along the Mohawk, amazingly enough the show arrived at the village of Mohawk on August 6. Reflecting on the date, the *Ilion Citizen* (from the adjoining town) commented that the "posters and pictures of the departed circus still and are monuments to the wonder of wonders to the countless children who stop and admire them with open mouths and dilated oculars (sic). The storm was rather disastrous to the Show but notwithstanding a large number took it in." The show was now only 15 miles south of its winter quarters at Newport. It was even closer at Middleville on August 8, being but five miles away from Newport after traveling almost a complete circle since May. After a short jaunt east to Salisbury Corners on August 9, the Robbins troupe turned northwest, arriving at Camden on August 17 and continuing on to Florance on the 18th and Williamstown the next day. The show was still charging 35 and 25 cents admission. It was almost to the edge of Lake Ontario. Early in September,



Robbins remained within shouting distance of Newport, being about 45 miles south at Bridgewater on September 5, and Leonardville on the 6th and Brookfield on the 7th.

The September 21st edition of the *Herkimer Democrat* noted that the "Great Metropolitan Allied Shows have closed for the season and gone into winter quarters here [Newport]. How successful the show has been, we are unable to say, further than it met with merited success." The Little Falls paper advised on September 30th that "Frank Robbins and family are occupying the Price house on the corner of Norway and East streets." It appears that he was now affluent enough to seek a home separate from this in-laws. This would be in keeping with the prosperity that accompanies a successful showman, which he was becoming.

As a last gesture to the season past, he advertised in an October *New York Clipper*, selling the cherished Tally-Ho Coach in perfect repair. He stated he would also consider exchanging it for other show property, preferring cages. His address was Newport, New York.

So the initial season of 1881 was over. The fact that it went out again in 1882 is indicia of a successful venture. Although the show took a few justified lumps for its performance (consider the ever popular Humpty-Dumpty feature), one senses that it was generally well received. This is very significant because at many dates the show played to knowledgeable audiences who had seen many large and small circuses in the past. Although the company was very small, it apparently had some excellent acts, an appealing free exhibition, and a fair band. It is reasonable to assume that Robbins made a good start in his pursuit of a first class circus.

The sobriquet "Bigger and Better" has been used to a nullity over the years by circuses, large and small. Notwithstanding, there has been more than a few occasions when this appellation was appropriate. If indeed the wagon counts of Robbins' 1881 and 1882 editions are nearly accurate, the show actually tripled in size, growing from six plus wagons to

twenty something. And we're not even counting the Royal Tally-Ho which was probably sold to one of a crush of buyers. He must have determined to change to title to one in which he had a vested interest: The Frank A. Robbins' Zoological and Equestrian Exposition. It was still fall when he introduced the show's new title in an ad in the December 17 *Clipper*. He wanted a whole host of folks, including riders, leapers, tumblers, acrobats, gymnasts, lady aerialists, sensational performers, musicians, concert people, sideshow features and keeping with one of his tenets, ten good bill posters. He was interested in purchasing (and what a difference a year makes) horses, ponies, mules, dogs, goats, etc. He used the Newport, New York address. In the February 11, 1882 *Clipper* it was reported that he had again secured the services of the Gregory family (Charles, George, Delia and James for horizontal bar, risley juggling and slack wire), Bert Waterman and his band, contortionist William Gaylord, and Alice Maurice for another season. These stalwarts were augmented by Frank Cravat, Dan Luke (probably an Irish comedian), concert clown William Mulligan, and Harry Lacardo. And there were more to come. Professor John Wingfield and his dogs, and Andrew Gaffney with his feats of strength handling cannonballs also signed up shortly thereafter. Sam Lent repeated as contracting agent. Robbins continued to seek sideshow attractions into March, and as late as April 15th he reaffirmed his quest for a lady gymnast. But completing his performers roster, he was also increasing his home staff. His wife Fanny continued to get bigger, and with the birth of their second son, Frank Jr., felt considerably better. Jr. would be heard from often during his 70 year involvement with the circus.



It's cold in them thair hills of upstate New York and spring comes late. Snow often falls up to early May and the ground is frozen almost to that time. It's not a forgiving spot to locate a circus winter quarters, particularly one that was greatly expanding. I suspect that a local barn was utilized for the purpose of building, repairing, painting and otherwise preparing for the onrushing season. I can't imagine that the quarters were heated so one would have to move fast to stay alive. Nevertheless, the local press was certainly aware of what was going on. On April 12th, the *Herkimer Democrat* advised that Robbins would open at Newport on April 29th. Not to be outdone, the *Newport Weekly Advertiser* stated unequivocally on April 15th that "Mr. Frank A. Robbins will start out this season May 1 with a 50 horse show, some animals and a 1st class performance. We learn that advertising alone will cost him \$400 per week." Besides proving that you can't always believe what you read in a newspaper, at least as it applies to the opening date, 50 horses and a \$400 weekly advertising budget may not be too far off.

The *Democrat* continued to follow the area's big news story by revealing on the 26th that "Frank A. Robbins' lions roar daily. On Saturday, a large crowd from the village [Newport] and the surrounding country will see and attend the circus to see the monster. The Little Falls *Journal* excitedly reported on the 24th that all arrangements were complete and everything was nearly in readiness for the opening. Staff and attractions were arriving every day. Several animals, including birds, were just arriving. A very fine cage containing a lion and lioness "having wonderful lungs," was received. The *Journal*, *Democrat* and *Weekly Advertiser* all reported that the show was well attended at the afternoon and evening performances, giving good satisfaction to all. It was called a "regular old fashion circus." The *Advertiser* also noted that several locals joined the circus for the coming season.

Competition from many circuses



was a fact of life in New York state. Nathans and Company featuring Dan Rice had been in the Mohawk Valley since mid-April. Robbins crossed paths with such shows as W. W. Cole; Myers & Shorb's Big United States Circus; Maybury, Pullman & Hamilton; S. H. Barrett; Ryan, Stevens & Robinson; M. M. Hilliard; Washburn; Van Amburgh; and John Doris. Of course Barnum cut a wide slash throughout the region, placing "Wait" ads up to three months prior to its intended date when it detected significant competition. Although at this time, Robbins was never considered significant competition, and as such, never the target of Barnum's "Wait" advertising, it must have been affected by it.

A weekend haul of twenty-five miles took the circus to Dolgeville on May 1 where the local paper observed that a "bona fide circus is coming . . . containing millions of novelties culled by a careful hand and presented in one stupendous whole. Whew!! The elephant will be there both afternoon and evening if the weather permits and if he don't (sic) forget his trunk. The street parade is described as a moving panorama never before seen in the memory of living man." While this latter belief was probably true, it probably wasn't in the manner anticipated. If anyone saw an elephant, it probably was pink.

The company moved generally east along the Mohawk River, picking up some repeat stands in the process. It visited St. Johnsville on May 2 where it was noted that the circus had everything new including horses, harnesses and wagons. It was quite a contrast from the previous year. Fort Plains on the 3rd, Canajoharie on the 4th and Fonda on the 5th followed in short hauls. It was reported that Canajoharie gave good business, stating that the "show is different in character from most circuses, and from the hundreds that attended no dissatisfaction expressed with the entertainment. Mr. Robbins, who by the way is the youngest circus proprietor in the world, has a good nucleus for a menagerie, and if his show grows another season as it has since last year, ere long he can stand

1882 Robbins' Show.


WILL EXHIBIT AT

Prattsburgh, Thur., June 29.

Branchport, Wed., June 28.

Avoca, Friday, June 30th.

1882



FRANK A. ROBBINS'

ZOOLOGICAL

—AND—

EQUESTRIAN

EXPOSITION.

Afternoon and Evening, for one Price of Admission.

Rare and Novel

ATTRACTIONS !

The Largest and Best Troupe of the Most Eminent Artists, in an exhaustive programme of the most exciting Acts.

RARE ANIMALS,

from all parts of the world, safely secured in Steel-clad Cages.

A Charming Aviary, composed of a splendid collection of Most Beautiful Birds, of graceful and peculiar forms and lovely plumage, presenting a rainbow of eye-entrancing color, and resembling a parterre of Winged Flowers.

Newspaper ad used by the Robbins show in 1882. Author's collection.

beside Barnum or any other circus man." The paper also said the circus grew from six wagons last year to twenty-six this year. Continuing east to Gloversville on May 6, the show garnered good business at both performances. The paper observed that the street parade was "not of the most imposing character, and the tent exhibitions, with some exceptional features, were rather tame." With that, the troupe headed northeast into the southern Adirondacks to

a Monday stand at Northville. Robbins routed the show rapidly east, reaching Schuylerville on May 11th, Greenwich on the 12th, Salem on the 13th and Cambridge on the 14th. It poured a deluge in Greenwich which affected attendance. However, the following incident was reported, one that must have made Robbins livid. It read, when "the strong man had finished performing with the cannon balls . . . he selected one and threw it outside the rope for the examination of the doubting ones. Harry Gray was one of this number and seizing hold of the ball failed to lift it. He waited his opportunity, and when one of the other balls rolled near the rope, he went inside to try his muscle on that, when one of the showmen stepped up and cuffed and kicked Harry, who beat a hasty retreat. This naturally excited the indignation of all who witnessed the act . . . the man who asserted his authority by kicking Harry was arrested in Salem and fined five dollars and cost. This amount made a bankrupt of the young man . . . a few 'chipped in,' bought his supper and procured him conveyance to Salem." It must have been a bad week for Robbins because Salem reported the circus "was about as poor a circus as we ever had. It was accompanied by a set of black-legs and three card monte men. A wealthy citizen of Salem became interested in the three card monte game, and went to the bank to draw \$1,000 to wager on this game, but was dissuaded from so doing by the president of the bank."

Cambridge was more generous with its comments, holding that although the attendance was not sufficient to make it profitable for the manager, the performance was better than last year. It predicted that in "time Robbins will no doubt get together a show of first class proportions. As yet there is a long distance between the promise of the hand bills and the performance in the ring. But in this respect Robbins does not differ much from the ordinary circus manager." I'm sure he would have been pleased if the afternotices ended on that note. However, in another column, it was stated that "Monday was circus day. Along with



the show came the usual complement of gamblers. Early in the morning these gentry got at work. It was a rainy and Vermont was not represented as it usually is [Cambridge is only a few miles from the Vermont border]. But as events turned out, this made no difference to the three card monte fellows, for they found a man living right in the village of Cambridge to fool with. Horace Weir was selected for the victim. The usual palaver was gone through with about locating in town and that sort of thing, when a chap was struck who could show tricks with cards. Weir guessed at one card, and was told that card would have turned him a thousand dollars, or had turned it to hum but that he must get \$500 and put it on the table before he got his thousand. Weir skirmished around and got a friend to endorse a note for \$500 on which he got the money from the bank. He then returned to his friends. One of the party desired to count the money, got it in his hands and made off with it. H. S. Lee heard of the matter and went to Robbins, proprietor of the circus, who succeeded in making the fellow disgorge and Weir got back his money. . . . The last circus that visited this village took \$625 out of a Vermonter. . . . The Vermonter had the excuse of being drunk. Horace had none." The scams were never-ending.

Robbins journeyed into western Massachusetts for a short visit before turning west back into New York for a repeat visit at Millerton on May 24 for a quiet day. "The attaches of the show not only appear, but act the part of gentlemen, and everyone seemed bent on enjoying themselves in a rational way. We take pleasure in commending the show in the patronage of the public." Pine Plains on the 25th and Red Hook on the 26th followed, the latter village reporting two interesting, well attend performances. The show crossed the Hudson on a Sunday morning by ferry after Rhinebeck on the 27th.

Entering the Caskill Mountains area the show embarked upon some tortuous and long jumps getting to Delhi on June 3rd. One haul to Margarettsville on May 31 was over 30 miles; arduous is too slight a

descriptor. At Stamford on June 2, the paper said that the circus was well attended. It went on to observe that owing "to some misunderstanding, a couple of the drivers came over the mountain from Roxbury [on June 1] by way of Narrow Notch and did not get here until half past one o'clock, consequently the large tent was not pitched until after 2 P.M." The misunderstanding probably was that the wagons went off a cliff! Despite the physical obstacles, the company made Delhi where it was remarked that the "managers appeared to be gentlemanly and those in their employ orderly and well-behaved. There was no bare-back or other riding usual in circuses, but ponies had been taught to teeter, waltz, etc., which they did very well, the ground and lofty tumbling was excellent, bar and trapeze performances good, and the educated dogs well trained, willing and anxious to do their several parts. The performances both morning and evening were well attended." The paper also noted that in nearby Hobart, the Van Amburgh Circus experienced a blowdown, injuring a number of spectators and a lady rider who sustained serious injuries. Meanwhile, Robbins was attempting to remedy the lack of a riding act by advertising in the *Clipper* on May 27th for both male and female riders with or without horses. He also required a well-broke pad-horse.

From the beginning of the season, Robbins' newspaper ads and newsy placements highlighted an aviary, the pony act, the free street parade, the Gregory family, the Broncho Stallions and William Gaylord. These advertising themes continued as the show progressed west though central New York playing Bainbridge on June 8 and continuing on to Greene on the 9th, and Oxfordton the

10th. On June 8th, the Bainbridge *Republican* provided insights of interest. The circus "is not a mammoth affair, but, for good performers we have seldom seen it equaled. Among the feats particularly worthy of notice was the performance by Charles Gregory in balancing various articles upon his feet, which was truly wonderful. Andrew Gaffney, in his performance with heavy cannon balls, which weighed respectively, 25, 35, 45, and 55 pounds, showed marvelous strength and endurance. The trained ponies and trained dogs we never saw excelled in any show, and the large force of minor performers were all excellent. . . . His force are all courteous and gentlemanly and appear to be of a higher class than usually found in circus circles."

The next week, Robbins was in the beautiful Finger Lakes area. At Marathon on June 13, he was six days ahead of M. M. Hilliard. Another positive report included these observations: "The F. A. Robbins Show . . . drew a large crowd, notwithstanding a slight rain. This show is not a Barnum or a Forepaugh show that makes a grand outside display, they [Robbins] made a nice street parade and gave the people their money's worth under the canvas. Every act was a host of performers; among the lot were the wonderful Gregory's whose performances held the audience spellbound. Mons. Gaylord, the India Rubber Man, is the best we ever saw in his type of business. The Broucho Stallions and Ponies can do everything but talk. Prof. John Wingfield with his Dog Circus, are a whole show by themselves. We have seen several troupes of so called performing Canines, but Prof. Wingfield's Dogs take the Cake." The day previous, the town of Cincinnatus also reported a good show. For what it is worth, the *Clipper* stated that business on the show was excellent. On June 15, at Dryden, ten miles east of Ithaca at the southern tip of Lake Cayuga and the home of Cornell University, it was reported the show was very good but did only so-so business. The newspaper article made many observations about people watching on circus day, noting that the liquor places maintained their normal levels but

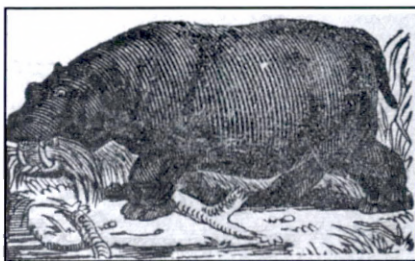




the village had far less drunkenness than usual on circus day. "The soap man, it continued, "had his little game running early in the day; but, so far as we learn, there were but few who cared to invest with the expectation of getting the greenbacks seen sticking out of the packages; while at Groton [on June 16] they were far more successful, reaping of some seventy-five dollars or over, of which sum Dan Dimon of that town contributed seven dollars, and others, too poor to take the Village paper, three to five dollars each." Groton did provide patrons to the circus in large numbers in addition to the aforementioned largess.

The show headed south between the largest of the Finger lakes, Cayuga and its twin a few miles to the west, Seneca, visiting Waterloo on June 21 and Ovid on the 22nd. At Waterloo, the afternotice stated that the street parade and the performance hardly came up to the highly colored pictures that were posted around town. The following Monday, at Dundee on the 26th, Ryan & Robinson was heavily advertising its nearby dates at Watkins and Penn Yan. Despite the competition, Robbins drew good crowds who were satisfied with the offerings. The same observations applied further west at Prattsburgh on the 29th and Canaseraga on July 1. The latter village is about 70 miles east of Lake Erie. At this point, the show turned south to Canisteo on July 3, and Jasper on the glorious Fourth. Canisteo was bad for both business and reviews. A local paper said it "is emphatically a one-horse affair in all its appointments, there being no horses in the ring, yet the tumbling, wire walking, trapeze performance and other feature were very good. There were only four or five cages of animals, and the street parade was indeed tame. The circus was accompanied by the usual side shows and games of chance."

At this point, the movements of the company are unknown until it appears for a repeat stand at Ticonderoga on August 12th. This date on Lake Champlain is hundreds of miles north east of Jasper. The show was heading north, reversing the direction taken the previous year.



After stands at Ausable Forks on August 18 and Keeseville on the 19th, the circus arrived at Plattsburgh on August 20th for its date there the next day, a Monday. This was a fairly large town. The paper reported that Robbins, "although small was better than the average. The performers were all good, but the main point of attraction was the baby lion, only eleven days old." Now we know what all the roaring was about April last, in winter quarters! The show continued north until it practically reached the Canadian border at the village of Champlain on the 24th.

Robbins then headed east across Vermont, crossed the Connecticut River, and played on its banks at Lancaster, New Hampshire on September 6th. Turning south, the circus played dates at Littleton on September 7 and Lisbon on the 8th. On September 14th, it was back in Vermont, seventy-five miles to the southeast at Woodstock. Continuing west, it played Wallingford, Vermont on the 20th, 10 miles south of Rutland and an equal distance from the New York state border at Hampton.

The September 9 *Clipper* reported that the Gregory family was closing with Robbins on October 8th and joining the George W. Maxwell's Black Crook Company. So it appears that the show's closing date was planned to be October 8th at the earliest.

However, the *Herkimer Democrat*, *Newport Weekly Advertiser* and *Ilion Citizen* all reported by the end of September that the show was back in quarters. The latter newspaper, dated September 29th, stated that "Mr. Robbins' Circus which started out from this place [Newport] last spring has returned. They will winter here again. They report business during the summer was good." I suspect that cold weather caused him to

close a bit earlier than planned. Another sign of a good businessman is the ability to rapidly change plans as a result of unanticipated circumstances. From what we know, business was indeed good and the season provided an additional platform for growth.

As a final reflection on the 1882 season, on November 4th, apparently responding to an offer from Robbins, James A. Bailey penned the following: "Yours of Oct 23/82 at hand. How old is the lioness you speak of. What is the price and when can it be seen." The outcome of this exchange is not known. It is interesting that Bailey would be involved in something so minor as the purchase of a fertile lioness. It may be just a courtesy on his part because Robbins' letter was addressed to him and Bailey may have considered him more than just a name. On the other hand, the personal response may have been an example of Bailey's micro-managing.

Always being one who was either in step with the times or ahead of it, Robbins perceived a need to present to his public the combination circus, museum and menagerie that was then so popular with showmen and their audiences. If there was a hesitancy on the part of potential ticket buyers to go to a disreputable circus performance with its scantily clad performers, they may be persuaded to be more receptive to the educational aspects of menageries and to a lesser extent, the museum harboring curiosities. Although his 1882 show apparently had a sideshow, it was not advertised as a museum. It was probably closer to a gambling hall than any anything else. It did not have any exhibits of name museum quality. Perhaps this shift from solely a circus focus was just part of the growing process. In many respects, a quality museum was as much a drawing card as the circus itself. It also must be emphasized that Robbins intended to play some of the same route in 1883 as 1882, so a new and different look was important in order to continue to command the public's attention.

The first indication of the temporary retirement of the Frank A. Robbins title and the substitution of



a more elaborate one was an ad placed in the January 20, 1883 *New York Clipper*. This want ad was headed, "NEW YORK CIRCUS, WOOD'S MUSEUM AND THE CENTRAL PARK MENAGERIE. Frank A. Robbins Proprietor and Manager." He required, "Riders with and without horses, sensational performances, bicycle riders, acrobats, gymnasts, giants, dwarfs, freaks of nature, rare curiosities, mechanical marvels, lecturer for museum, concert people, band and orchestra, a contracting agent, an advertising agent, twenty first class billposters, a master of canvas, boss hostler that can lead baggage, property men, animal men, drivers, canvas men and people in every branch of the business." He also offered the sideshow and candy stand privilege. This ad reveals the fleshing out of much needed staff personnel. The show was getting too large for one man, however hard-working, to handle.

It wasn't but a couple of weeks later when the *Clipper* stated that Giles Pullman had signed on as the general agent and manager of the advance. Henry W. Mann was aboard as the contracting agent, and the second brigade would be under the direction of Asa J. Robbins (is this brother Oran J. by another name?). Performers that were scheduled included Frank Charvat (repeater), Felix McDonald and his wife, Alice (equestrian), William Gaylord (3rd season as contortionist), Alice Maurice (3rd season), Andrew Gaffney (repeater as cannon ball strong man), Billy Mulligan (concert clown?)(repeater), Tommy Nichols (tumbler?), and Robert Whitaker (equestrian). Bert Waterman and his band of ten musicians was signed for his third season. Lastly, John Foster, the famous singing clown, also joined the troupe. Robert Whitaker had a dual role including that of equestrian director As of March 31st, Robbins. was still seeking a lady gymnast who could accomplish the difficult slide for life by her hair or teeth. This quest must have been soon satisfied because his very nifty eight page courier featured on its front page, Kaco, the Parisian Aerial Queen, suspended by her hair in

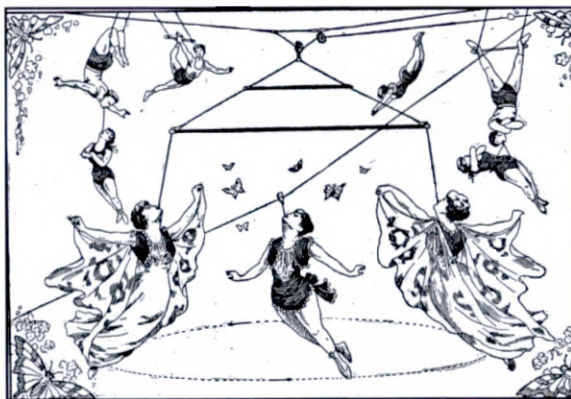
the slide for life over the recognizable Niagara Falls no less.

As importantly, the title of the Show had been changed to the Great New York Circus, G. B. Bunnell's Broadway Museum and Central Park Menagerie, a Combination of Three Glorious Shows in Union forming the Banner Triune Shows! Now that's more like it--a title that one is not likely to forget. Although the show played a fair number of dates in New York state, make no mistake about it; what Robbins was communicating in his title was New York City and all of the obvious connection to the big and best of circus. The connection between Bunnell and the company is not known. He was a very well known museum operator and the courier claimed that he currently had a major operation at Broadway and 9th Street in New York City. Bunnell also averred that he had "offshoots" in Brooklyn (still a separate city from New York), Jersey City, Brighton Beach (a resort area of Brooklyn near what eventually became Coney Island), and Boston. Bunnell also stated that he had overseas operations in England. If that wasn't enough, he apparently also had a traveling Opera House. Reading the courier, one gets the impression that this was his show. Research has not revealed any evidence that he was actually on the show and in all probability, lent his name for a monthly sum. Nevertheless the museum featured a 3-headed songstress (undoubtedly a precursor to the Andrew Sisters), Mne. Petty with hair over 6 feet long, and a beautiful tattooed lady made all the more remarkable because her body was covered with 356 scenes (count them) of all sorts placed there

while a captive by the obviously none-too-friendly Ute Indians. Of course, the courier contained suitable art work to accompany this stunning revelation. Alice McDonald and Robert Whitaker were also highlighted with special artwork. John Foster, Frank Charvat, William Gaylord and Andrew Gaffney were prominently mentioned. This is a first-class courier in all respects and is a strong indication of the importance Robbins placed on advertising the show. Lastly, the courier took a vicious swipe at railroad circuses as being all things bad and probably devolved from Satan himself. Throughout the season, Robbins felt the competition from many shows, a number of which were on rails.

As a manifestation of the maturing process of his circus, Robbins placed a "Call" ad in the *Clipper*, requiring all engaged personnel to report to Newport, New York on the opening date of April 26th, in time for the parade. So much for dress rehearsals. About the same time, he hired William Randolph as boss hostler, and Frank Pryme as boss canvasman (later replaced by William Dunbar). For sale ads placed after the season indicate that big top was a 90-round. It may have had a 30 or 40-middle.

With the season rapidly coming, the local press noticed the prospect of fine entertainment. The *Newport Advertiser* stated that the Herkimer, Newport & Poland Railroad was offering an excursion on circus date to and from Poland and Middleville for 50 cents, which included a general admission ticket. Both excursion towns were about eight miles from Newport. Reporting on the opening date, the next week the *Advertiser* noted that all who attended the circus were well pleased with it. "The performance was good and the clowns made some very funny remarks which kept the audience in good humor, even though the weather was cold. Attendance was good." The next day, April 27, at Little Falls, the paper observed that the show was fairly attended considering the weather. It went on to say that the "exposition





here was the second given this year and of course everything did not work as smoothly as it will in a few weeks time. It was, however, evident to tell that the show has enough talent traveling with it to make it well worth seeing." Herkimer, seven miles southwest of Little Falls, was the next stand for Robbins. Remarkably, three days later (including a Sunday) the show was at Cobleskill, New York, over 60 miles to the southeast of Herkimer. Cobleskill was also favored with a visit from Nathans & Co. on May 3 which featured none other than Colonel Dan Rice, the clown supreme. Although Robbins received a good review which stated it was well worth the admission price of 25 cents, Nathans & Co. was lauded as being superior entertainment. Madam Dockrill, a featured bareback rider, was singled out as great. Dan Rice delighted the crowd with a witty speech. He had visited Cobleskill thirty years previous.

The show continued south across the western part of the Catskill Mountains and had stands at Westfield Falls on May 9, Liberty on the 10th, Monticello on the 11th, and Wurtsboro on the 12th. The troupe had very good attendance at Liberty and Wurtsboro. There was no evidence of "soap men" on circus day. During this time, the newspaper ads stressed museum features such as the three headed songstress, the long haired beauty and the tattooed lady. Also significantly mentioned in the ads was the rapid descent of Mlle. Kaco's slide for life which was a free exhibition. Quickly heading northeast, the show crossed the Hudson River via the Kingston ferry at Rhinebeck on May 16. The next day at Pine Plains, the circus was considered "a success as far as getting a crowd of ticket buyers was concerned. The exhibition was about what was expected by all except those who expected too much. Brunnell's museum comprised of the tattooed woman, the long haired lady and the three headed Songstress, the latter an optical illusion produced with mirrors. The Central Park Menagerie included two lions, a dozen monkeys and a cage of parquets. The New York Circus was

composed of features venerable with age... however, the juggling and balancing were good." This review provides a reasonably comprehensive account of what the show was about. It was probably good value at 25 cents, but not much more. Hillsdale on May 18, Valatie on the 19th, and Canaan Four Corners on May 21 followed. At the latter two dates, excellent business was garnered with very good reviews.

Concurrent with these dates, the circus advertised for four horse drivers and canvasmen, a requirement that continued from time to time until the end of the season.

Robbins routed his show north into western Massachusetts, visiting West Cummington on May 25, on its way though New Hampshire, which among other stands, included Warner on June 4 and Laconia on the 7th. The troupe was about to embark on its initial tour of Maine which always was the most iconoclastic of Yankee states. If Missouri is the

A New York Circus and Bunnell's Museum newspaper ad. Author's collection.

**COMING! COMING!**  
Wait and Watch For  
**THE NEW YORK CIRCUS.**  
G. B. BUNNELL'S MUSEUM AND THE  
CENTRAL PARK MENAGERIE  
WHICH WILL POSITIVELY APPEAR AT  
MONTICELLO ON FRIDAY MAY 11th, 1883,  
Afternoon and Evening.  
Rehearsal given at one and seven. Performance to commence one hour later.



500 Rare and Wonderful Curiosities Lead by the  
TATTOOED LADY.  
THE 3 HEADED NIGHTINGALE. The Lady With  
Hair 6 feet in length, trailing the ground as she walks. THE HINDOO Snake  
Charmer and the beautiful Ethiopian Lady. 50 Fourfoot Arctic Stags. 10  
Active Lady Performers, Intrepid Bare Back Riders, Beautiful Lady  
Wire Walkers. A RARE COLLECTION of Living Wild Animals.  
A PRINCIPAL PROCESSION AT 10 A. M.  
**A GRAND FREE EXHIBITION.**  
A Startling Mid Air Flight, made at a height of 150 feet; when with Lightning Rapidity Mlle. KACO, the beautiful Parisian Aerial Queen will descend to mother earth, suspending her graceful form by a cord which thread grasped only by her teeth.  
No Extra Charge under any pretense whatever. Bring your families to see the biggest and best show that ever visited your place; if you have to rise with the lark and travel many miles.  
Will also Exhibit at Liberty May 10th. Wurtsboro May 12th.

**ONE 25 CENT TICKET ADMITS TO ALL.**  
*Will return*

show-me state, Maine is the prove-it-to-me-again-and-again state. Few shows have been successful there, year after year. Frank A. Robbins, Walter L. Main, and Charles Sparks (both his Sparks and Downie shows) are numbered in this exclusive club. Robbins' route in Maine took it to the Canadian border, reaching Calais on July 11th. On July 13th, the show was at the most eastern town in the United States, Eastport. It headed south, playing Maine dates for the next three weeks before arriving back in New Hampshire at Farmington, on August 6th. The business in Maine was reported to be good. At Machias on July 16, the lioness gave birth to five cubs, four of which were doing fine. The company continued to seek drivers, canvasmen, and a groom. Robbins claimed to have the best cookhouse on the road and was the payer of good wages. His performance must have required some enhancement because he sought a good pad or bareback rider.

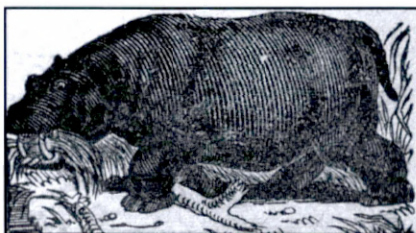
The route took the troupe across New Hampshire and Vermont for the next three weeks and then back into New York. At Cambridge, New York on August 29, "the Bunnell's New York circus... did not succeed in drawing very many people into town. There was but a small attendance either afternoon or evening. Some parts of the programme were very good, but as a whole it was far from being first-class." It will be recalled that in 1882, the Cambridge reviewer thought better of the show. The next day at Greenwich, Robbins got much higher marks in both attendance and evaluation of the performance. A date at Salem closed out the month of August. The performance "pronounced to be 'fair to middling,' and Madame Somebody, the bearded lady, who held forth in the side show was a trifle above the standard in many respects; in fact she would have made a very respectable three headed lady as far as tongue is concerned. She opened up on several people who failed to pay her the respect due her high position, (she stood about two feet above the audience) but as the manager pronounced her a lady in every sense of the word,



people took it for granted that such was the case and kept mum as it is against the will of the Salemites to be disrespectful to a lady under any circumstances. With this one exception every thing passed off as quietly as circuses generally do."

The show headed north toward Canada along the west side of Lake Champlain. In an ad at Plattsburgh on September 11, the incredible tattooed, "pretty picture of PUNCTURED PURITY" was identified as Nora Hilderbrant for the first time. This town reported very good attendance at both performances. "The performers were all good, the managers and men all acted gentlemanly, and the best order was preserved in the tents and on the grounds. Taken altogether, it was far ahead of the average circus troupes which are traveling around the country." Similar complementary afternotices was received at Chattangay on September 15 with attendance in kind. Heading west just south of the Canadian border, the show reached its farthest point at Ogdensburg on September 20 on the St. Lawrence River. With the first winter chills in the air, the company rapidly headed south, whipping by Newport with nary a look on September 29th. Besides the oncoming cold, there was a larger reason why the show did not return to Newport. Robbins had bigger plans which never again included Newport. It was too remote, too frigid, too small to meet his expanded needs. It was a rush to get to the southern climes—to New Jersey yet-an oxymoron if there ever was one.

The resort town of Cooperstown at the southern tip of Lake Otsego was visited on October 4th. It was in the midst of the fall foliage season. It was certainly not traditional circus time. A bit farther south, at Sidney Plains, while advertising for its date there on October 6, a most curious ad was placed. In bold print, the ad stated "Go and see the Five cunning Little ELEPHANTS." How or why this ad appeared is not known. To the extent that research has established, there never had been any elephants connected with the show to this point. In addition, the ad is unique—never seen before nor after.



One can only wonder why. There were no afternotices at Sidney Plains to shed light on this anomalous claim.

Robbins was in his final two weeks of this season. He was now in the very rugged land of the Delaware River basin. Today's roads are tortuous enough. It is difficult to imagine navigating these remote roads in the dead of night, but the show did it. At Hancock on October 9, it was noted that several of the showmen bought their winter suits at Scutt's Shanty, a local merchant. The paper went on to say that three "strangers arriving in town . . . on circus day intent on taking in the great show, rushed wildly through the crowd that was going in and out of the Shanty Store, and making their way to the counter, where Scutt, the Shanty man, was busy. The tallest of them, about six and a half feet, with hat down on his head until his ears lopped over with the load they were holding up, demanded three tickets, slapping three quarter dollars on the counter saying, 'we are all come to the show.' The Shanty man, feeling a little amused, smilingly replied that he did not have any for them, whereupon the six and a half footer gave his hat a shove to the back of his head and commenced rolling up his sleeves. Scutt taking in the situation and fearing his ability to cope with such a pair of muscles as was displayed, asked to have time to explain. When they were informed that the crowd was there only to get some of the great bargains . . . and not to get tickets, they withdrew, remarking that they followed the crowd and supposed that the tickets must be for sale there. They then went on their way, saw the show, and then returned to the Shanty, apologized for the abrupt and excited manner in which they entered the Shanty, each bought a suit, and then returned home better clad and wiser than before." Such was the onslaught of patrons for the

show—ready to do deadly damage for a ticket. The day previous at Deposit, business was good but without the intrigue.

A couple of days later, the troupe was on its final dash to quarters. It entered New Jersey in the very hilly northwest corner at Montague on October 13. At Deckertown on the 15th, it arrived on Sunday and pitched its tents upon arrival. The attendance at the afternoon show was large with many people coming from the surrounding countryside. Fewer folks were in attendance at night. The menagerie was noted to be small, but the circus was passably fair. The other paper considered the performances good, particularly considering that it was within two days of the season's close. The weather was really too cold to enjoy an outdoor performance. The paper commented that the horses looked remarkably well, after their tedious drive of the past few weeks. Amen to that. The next day at Newton drew the comment "the circus . . . gave a passable performance in a very frigid temperature. On the day previous, an organ grinder—the last of the season we hope, made doleful noises about town, but like the circus was on his way to winterquarters." Attendance was slight and it was noted that the street parade looked as though it had been frost bitten, which it probably was. On the closing date at Hackettstown on October 11, the local paper also said the street parade had a frost bitten appearance. However, a fair show was given. There were 525 tickets sold at the wagon for the afternoon performance and probably as many more in the evening.

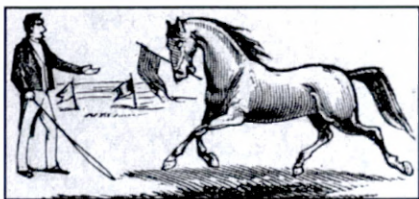
There remained a thirty-five mile trek southwest to the new winterquarters at Frenchtown, New Jersey. This small town is also on the Delaware River, about forty miles north of the state capitol at Trenton. It has no commanding features that would attract a showman. It is in a reasonably prosperous area, generally specializing in dairy farming. Its center abuts the Delaware, and it possibly enjoyed river and canal traffic (the Delaware Canal) that contributed to its well being. To the extent known, it had no previous cir-



cus history. The near by Milford *Leader* of October 17th observed that the "Robert's (sic) circus will arrive at Frenchtown on Thursday of this week. They will not exhibit, but will take up their winterquarters at Mrs. Magee's across the river (in Pennsylvania). Mr. Roberts (sic) and family will stop at the Railroad House. Mr. G. W. Bunn (sic), we understand, is to find shelter for all of the wagons for the coming winter, and build two new ones, besides overhauling and repairing all the harness. It is believed they will exhibit in this place before they start out in the spring."

The plan was not only to seek a more temperate environment at Frenchtown, but to secure a new venue for a most significant event, the conversion to rails. A strong position can be established that this was always Robbins' plan. To become a railroad show, especially achieving that size in three short years, was yet another measure of success. It was another necessary giant step in his obvious objective of owning a major circus equivalent to the biggest and the best.

Notwithstanding Robbins' attempt to demonize railroad circuses the previous season, it was clearly the only way to go if he was to have a major show. Putting together a railroad circus in a relatively short period of time over the winter was an awesome task. Outside of the cages, most of his other wagons were specifically built for overland travel, light weight and small width. They had limited carrying capacity for all the obvious reasons, most of which related to the general road condition and the nature of the terrain traversed. With the rail show, the wagons were more heavily constructed, and because of scarce loading length space available, would be loaded taking advantage of additional height as well as width. As the 1883 season drew to a close in early October, Robbins was already offering to sell his bandwagon (which was apparently built for the 1882 season), bill wagon, ticket wagon, canvas, seats, banners and wardrobe. Shortly thereafter, he also offered to sell 20 baggage wagons that were suitable for a mud show.



In the *Clipper* of December 29th, we are apprised of the new title of his show: The Frank A Robbins Circus, Museum and Menagerie. Under this new title, he set forth his needs for a whole variety of acts, in addition to living curiosities suitable for the museum or sideshow. He also required concert people, agents, bill-posters, drivers, canvas men and other useful folks. Most interestingly, he was only seeking an advertising car. As no mention was made of standard flats, stock cars and coaches, it is assumed that he had already secured them. Milton Robbins, Frank A.'s son, told C. P. Fox in 1975 that the original rail equipment came from Adam Forepaugh. This is possible, but during the 1884 season, Frank Charvat, a performer on the show, wrote the *Sporting and Theatrical Journal*: "We . . . run seven fifty-foot flat cars, five fifty-foot stock cars and three sleeping cars for people." Not only is this snippet valuable for sizing the show (if indeed this information is accurate) but place the car lengths at fifty feet. Fifty foot cars were state-of-the-art at the time. In Fred Dahlinger's comprehensive "The Development of the Railroad Circus" in the November-December 1983 *Bandwagon* et seq., he documents that the original Forepaugh railroad cars in 1877 were forty feet in length. It appears that they were still on the Forepaugh Show in 1884. Thus, if Charvat's statement was accurate, Robbins' rail equipment may not have come from Forepaugh. Of course, Forepaugh may have purchased additional rail equipment, but it seems unlikely that he would keep forty footers and sell or lease Robbins fifty foot cars. Charvat further provided information on the parade which is also pertinent to the flat car lengths. He said that the parade showed twelve cages, five tableaux cars, two bands, two pony teams, two elephants, four camels, mounted people and the "Mardi Gras," whatever

that may have been. With fifty foot length cars, loading space would approximate three hundred and fifty feet. Even with cross cages, one must assume around seventy-five feet of loading space for cages alone. Add to this total the sixty plus feet for the tableaux and it doesn't leave much for the rest of the show. The problem would be amplified if the length of the flats was only forty feet.

Early on, Robbins was successful in adding E. D. Colvin as assistant manager and manager of the sideshow and museum. Colvin was a very well known showman both as an owner and circus executive. It may be that he had a financial interest in the sideshow which would make his joining the growing show more understandable. On the other hand, he may also have found Robbins' goals and objectives to be sufficiently compelling to justify his coming aboard. In addition to him, there was assembled an impressive number of experienced and well respected circus executives, department heads and performers. H. B. Knapp assumed the important role of general agent; Lewis B. Lent, famous old-time circus executive, was railroad contracting agent; Henry W. Mann, contacting agent (repeater); Thomas Bowen, treasurer; C. B. Combs, assistant treasurer; James E. Cooke, (repeater but now as equestrian director); Felix Mc Donald, (repeater but now as superintendent of the menagerie); Professor Hutchinson, museum lecturer; Lucius Foster, master of canvas; Albert Tuttle, boss hostler; and Professor A. G. Noble, bandmaster with a ten member band.

Performers included Alice McDonald, somersault rider (re-peater and wife of Felix); Mme. Dubsky, equestrian; William Odell, equestrian; Charles Lowry, champion jockey rider; Miss Aurora Greyling, menage; James E. Cooke, champion four and six horse rider (repeater); Queen Sarbro, ladder of swords and juggler; Mlle. Alma, (Delia D'Alma?) ceiling walker; Flora Hall, aerial act; Abenatta, hindoo snake charmer; Signora Rigode, queen of the flaming zone; Frank Charvat, crystal pyramids (repeater); Andrew Gaffney, 58 year old cannon balls strong man



(repeater—3rd season); De-coma Bros., aerial bicyclists; John Foster, clown (repeater); and George Burnell, roller-skating. Concert personnel included Haley and Wood, clown William Muligan (repeater-3rd season), Al Saunders, Little Burdell, and Allie Mills. Working in the museum for E. D. Colvin were Dr. Lynn, vivisectionist; Professor Reynolds, performing birds; Albino lady; living skeleton; circassian lady; white moor; John J. Darlington; Mlle. Baum, tattooed lady; Miss Lizette, long-haired lady; Miss Louiner, three headed vocalist; Professor Tony White's phonograph; giant; dwarf; eight-footed horse; and Egyptian mummy. The performer roster was modified from time to time during the season, reflecting additions and deletions of personnel. All in all, it was a very impressive assembly of talent, both in staff and artists.

In the April 5th 1884 *Clipper*, Robbins placed a call noting that the opening date would be April 19th at its winter quarters village of Frenchtown, New Jersey. In a neighboring newspaper, the *Milford, New Jersey Leader*, the first ad for the show was entitled Frank A. Robbins' New Shows, Circus, Museum and Menagerie, forming the Banner Triune Shows! The artwork featured riders, museum features and wild animals. The paper reported that the performance was largely attended with a crowded tent in the evening. "The performance was very good." The show charged 25 cents admission. Moving in a small loop through south central New Jersey, the show played Bordentown on April 25th. The attending ad featured Zazel in the slide for life free act. Apparently Robbins had yet to decide on the final title for the company because the mention of "Banner Triune Shows!" was absent, but resurrected at the next stand, Lambertville. The residents of Bordentown must have enjoyed the show if the local paper described the circumstance correctly. It stated that the "rousing audiences attended the Robbins new show (sic).



Zazel was advertised by Robbins in 1884. Pfening Archives.

... The enthusiasm of the spectators was aroused to the highest pitch by the leading features of the performance. By common consent the entertainment was pronounced one of the best of the kind ever seen in this city. Many of the feats performed were novel in the circus line and all the performers fitted well in their respective parts. The proprietor, Frank A. Robbins ... although only 27 years of age, has owned and managed a circus for the past four years. ... [T]he day is not far distant when he will take a position in the front ranks. He has not mistaken his vocation." Lambertville, with Forepaugh and his white elephant due on April 30 at Easton, Pennsylvania, thirty-five miles north, drew two large audiences to their general satisfaction.

The show jumped seventy miles to the north over Sunday for a single day excursion into Pennsylvania at Stroudsburg on April 28. It used the Banner Triune title. The local paper said the show "was well worth more than the small price of twenty-five cents admission. In fact, everything advertised by them is performed and much more. Another great feature of it is that everyone connected therewith are perfect gentlemen in business and sociality and the greatest part of it is that there is not a single game of chance in one way or another allowed upon the ground by Mr. Robbins. It is a first class circus and one of the best twenty-five cent shows ever in this town." Contrary

to all of the negative reports regarding grifting before and after 1884, there is virtually no comment regarding this practice that season. This welcome, albeit brief, foray into running a straight arrow operation was corrected in 1885 with no holds barred. The show was back in New Jersey the next day at Washington. It was still confronted by Forepaugh newspaper ads for the Easton date. I

suspect that Forepaugh papered these towns as well, despite being 40 miles from Easton. That there was little or no gambling on the show grounds, didn't mean that confidence men didn't follow the show. At Washington, it was reported that a respected local citizen was buttonholed while watching the circus parade by a young man who asked him his opinion of the Washington Bank, saying he was a large stockholder and employee of the 1st National Bank of Easton. He was looking around with the intention of buying a farm. The young man advised that he was involved in a game up the street, and had drawn \$101 and three oil paintings, and that if the gentleman would go along, he would get the paintings and give him one. Just as they approached the game, another young man came up, greeting the other young man and asked him how it was possible for him to get out of work at the bank in Easton. This new young man indicated that he heard that his friend has been lucky at the gambling game. This was acknowledged by his friend and was requested to join him. He also promised to give the new young friend one of the oil paintings. The three men went to the game and the initial young man bet again, winning another \$10. The respected local citizen was asked if he wanted to play. He reluctantly agreed and promptly won \$750 which was immediately counted out for him. For once the bunko artist over stepped his hand because this was just too much luck for the local man. He refused the money, bolted for the door and



At Hackettstown on April 30 the show introduced a new ad that was obviously written for 1884. It set forth a number of performers. It also highlighted the museum and menagerie features. Lastly, for the first time the ad named the free street parade as being none other than "Lalla Rookh and the Handsomest Lady in the land." It also promoted the sensational act in mid air but didn't identify it further. Continuing to generally head east through north central New Jersey, the troupe visited Dover on May 1, Chester on the 2nd and Morristown on the 3rd. Each jump was only around 25 miles. Excellent business was garnered in Dover which was surpassed in Morristown. The local paper stated that "[W]e have seen a great many crowds of people, but never have we witnessed one that equaled the vast concourse that filled F. A. Robbins' mammoth tents last night. It was simply immense; the sight that burst upon our view upon entering, the circus apartment was magnificently brilliant. An audience of nearly 6,000 composes all of the elite of the city. On all sides could be heard expressions of admiration. Many people were heard to say, 'Well, if all circuses and menageries are like this one, I shall never stay away from them.'" Certainly, good thoughts were left in Morristown.

head were returned to the body and the man walked out amongst the vast audience as good as ever. . . . The large tent which holds around 5,000 people was comfortably filled. . . . Most noteworthy [acts] were given by Mlle Ahnetta, who fondled and caressed boa constrictors and anacondas as she would a pet dog; Mlle Elme walking in mid air with her head hanging downward; Mlle Sarbro walked on a ladder of knives with edges as keen as razors; and last but not least, the old time favorite, Mr. James E. Cooke in his astonishing act of riding four horses and his exhibition with trick ponies."

"The circus came [to Hemstead, Long Island, May 7th] in the midst of a pouring rain. This looked rather ominous for its success, especially as the afternoon performance had to be omitted. Fortunately for the show the rain ceased in the evening, although a mist continued to fall. But our people showed themselves not to be fair weather circus goers. They crowded the canvases to the extent of about fifteen hundred, making a good thing for the well-pleased proprietors. The performances were pronounced good, and all left determined that whatever else they missed, they were never going to miss a circus." They were obviously people of good taste. Heavy rain also greeted the Robbins family at Huntington, Long Island on May 8th. However, the show still drew over a thousand paying customers in the evening. The circus must have been a rather disruptive event because on two separate occasions, passing horses panicked and upset the wagons that they were pulling which was more excitement than even a horse can handle.

times, Mott Haven became the home of great freight yards of the New York Central and the New Haven Railroads. Ringling-Barnum's under canvas shows unloaded there for the Madison Square Garden date. More recently, the area gained national notoriety as the "South Bronx," an area replete with drugs, gangs and all things evil. Today, it is undergoing massive rehabilitation and is well on its way to economic recovery.

Heading north along the east bank of the Hudson, the show jumped twenty-five miles to Tarrytown which was followed with a thirty mile passage to Peekskill. At the latter location, the Banner Triune Shows title reappeared along with the now tradi-

[illegible]



of equestrian, gymnastic, acrobatic and aerial representations ever witnessed by our amusement loving public. . . . [N]o objectionable features were introduced. . . . [T]he entertainment was thoroughly enjoyed by the immense audiences in attendance afternoon and evening. . . . F. A. Robbins' new show is one of the best on the road." Given the fact that the populous of Yonkers frequently saw the best circuses in the country, Barnum's and Forepaugh's, these are strong compliments indeed. The show completed a wonderful week at New Rochelle on May 24 with excellent business and heady afternoons.

The show was heading east now with a short jump of ten miles to Port Chester for a Monday date. The good business and reviews continued. It entered Connecticut at Stamford, where the local paper said the "Show gave two entertainments in our city . . . and fully maintained the reputation which preceded the company. . . . The show is one of the best that has ever paid us a visit." With another twelve mile run to Norwalk, could we not expect similar accolades? Most certainly one! Norwalkians must have marched to a different drummer because the review reflected that "Wednesday was a typical circus day, and the attendance at Robbins' show was small. At the afternoon performance there was a startling array of empty benches upon which the rain dripped most dismally. The menagerie hardly deserves so dignified a title. There were two camels, two very small elephants, an aged lion, and several other beasts who sleep most of the time and looked sorry the rest [how happy can a wild beast be in Norwalk?]. The evening attendance was larger, the rain having ceased. The ring performance consisted of little that was new, most of the acts being as old as the lion in the adjoining tent." Robbins must have left half of the company in Stamford. The circus drew well in Meriden the next day. While there, the paper noted that John Simpson, bicyclist, and Alle Mills, equestrian, knocked at the door of the local Justice of the Peace after the evening performance, around 10:30 p. m. They expressed their desire to get married and Mr. Hull promptly

obliged. It was a jolly affair and Ms. Mills wore a blue silk dress. Robbins day and dated Delavan & Co.'s Great Dime Tent Show which was playing a week's stand in Meriden. Delavan claimed a seating capacity of 3,000. It also paraded the same day as Robbins. Of interest, the week previous Delavan played nearby New Britain. The review there claimed that there were at least 3,000 in the tent. Everything about the show was first class, with an excellent brass band and not a poor feature with the show. Robbins journeyed to New Britain after playing Middletown the next day, May 30. These were short jumps of 15 miles or so.

The next week, the show gravitated to the eastern part of Connecticut, exiting Putnam on June 5th, heading north for a week in Massachusetts, initially in the central part of the state and then to the East Coast above Boston, playing the fishing center of Gloucester on June 10th. After a couple of dates in New Hampshire, Robbins made a mighty weekend leap of 120 miles from Rochester, New Hampshire on June 7 to a Monday date at Rockland, Maine on June 9. Heading south back to



Bath, the show played the next three weeks in Maine. Longer daily moves were in order throughout the sparsely populated interior. Robbins played the capital city of Augusta on June 21st. Then it headed north up the Kennebec River visiting Waterville on June 23 and Skowhegan the next day before heading directly to the coast for its June 25th date at Belfast. It worked its way north, doing good business until it reached the Canadian border at Calais on Independence Day.

Except for dipping into Maine again for three dates, Robbins spent the rest of July and all of August in Canada. Interestingly, for its initial

date in Canada, the show crossed the border after leaving Calais and then traveled seventy miles to Canterbury in New Brunswick; all in a single night. Charles Bernard, writing in the January 13, 1934 *Billboard*, stated while at Fredrickton July 14, the show displayed a white llama, a wild yak of Tartara, a Abyssinian ibex and kangaroos. As good as business was reported in Maine, some of the takes in Canada were described as great. Three days at St. John, New Brunswick, July 15-17, were time well spent in terms of business and locals reactions. It had to be because some rail moves were indeed challenging. For instance, in order to get from the west side to the east side of the St. John River, the show was forced to send its train to Quebec, a round trip distance of twelve hundred miles, to cross the river which was about a quarter mile in width. Of course, it picked a number of dates in the process, ones that otherwise might not have been scheduled.

After St. John, the show headed north east, leaving New Brunswick in a series of short moves that ended at Sackville on July 22. It then appeared in Nova Scotia at Amherst on the 23rd, a pleasant eleven miles south. After three stands en route south, the company headed to its big three day stand at Halifax, Nova Scotia's capital, from July 28 to 30. It was joyville in this city. The *Herald* reported, "Robbins' circus last night drew an enormous crowd, the large tent being filled to overflowing. The performance was thoroughly enjoyed, applause and laughter being continuous. The darling feats of Mlle. Oswald on the flying rings [her first mention--probably a new addition] and Mlle. Alma on the trapeze, won general admiration. These performers have never been beaten in their particular lines in this city. The De Como brothers do a difficult velocipede and trapeze act, which is one of the principal features of the show. Chas. Lowry's bareback riding and Mons. Gaffney's tossing of heavy balls are admirable and well worth seeing. The comic part of the programme is done full justice to by Col. Foster, and altogether the entertainment is such as to give very general satisfaction."



The show continued its tour of Nova Scotia, heading northwest to Kentville on the southern shore of the Bay of Fundy, world renown for its forty foot tides. It continued west along the southern shore of the Bay as far as Annapolis on August 2nd before reversing itself in an easterly direction, picking up dates in Middleton and Windsor on August 5. On Saturday of that week, the troupe played the port village of Pictou, boarded two large steamers there and sailed some fifty miles of the calm waters of Northumberland Strait to the capital of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown. For the two days at Charlottetown on August 11-12, business was enormous, primarily because it was the first time since the ice age that elephants or their likeness were seen on Prince Edward Island. The ticket wagon closed a half hour before each performance, such was the crush. It was reported that "hundreds were refused admission. . . . The performance last evening was beyond the expectation of all, and though the riders had several difficulties to contend with, very good riding, bareback and otherwise, was accomplished, particularly by Mr. Charles Lowry and Mr. James E. Cooke. The aerial performances of the Decoma (sic) Brothers excited hearty applause while the trapeze and ring gymnastics were cleverly done. Andrew Gaffney enacted a number of Herculean feats with heavy cannon balls and one of the Decoma Bros. proved himself to be a superb contortionist. During the performance, John Foster held the immense audience spell bound with laughter." The show concluded its brief Prince Edward Island sojourn with a date at Summerside on August 13, before steaming across the Northumberland Strait, this time to Shediac, New Brunswick for an August 14 engagement. It may be that the entire Prince Edward Island adventure was made by steamer and the train left on the mainland, going empty the one hundred fifty miles from Pictou to Shediac. As all four towns were seaports, the tour may have been accomplished in this manner.

In any event, Robbins. made a

short jump to Moncton, New Brunswick, a town that made its imprint upon circus historians as being close by the site of the devastating train wreck of Al. G. Barnes Circus forty-six years later. Although Robbins had more than his share of train mishaps over the years, nothing of that sort confronted the company that day. The show rapidly headed north along the sea coast of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, reaching Newcastle on August 19th and Bathurst on August 20th.



Cambellton was the final date in New Brunswick and then the show made a hundred mile haul to Remuski, Quebec, on the southern shore line of the St. Lawrence River, the banks of which are about thirty miles apart at that point. It continued on the southern bank of the river as it gradually narrowed until it was but a mile wide at Quebec City. Robbins did not cross the river but instead played Pt. Levis on August 29 to packed houses within clear view of the mighty fortress and the Plains of Abraham which gained fame during the French and Indian War. There was only one date remaining in the Canadian tour and that was the next day at Stanfold. Business was excellent throughout.

The show spent the next day, a Sunday, traveling to and crossing into the United States at Rouses Point, New York, continuing south another twenty miles to Plattsburgh on September 1 and an additional fifty miles to Port Henry on the 2nd on the western shore of Lake Champlain. This is an area that was well traveled by Robbins' wagon shows, so he was known both as a showman and a personality. At Port Henry, there was a short but interesting review of the parade and an extensive review of the performance, providing an idea of the order of the acts, and an abbreviated program

listing: "[T]hey gave a street parade, headed by a military band, followed by a cavalcade and cages. A brass band of colored musicians brought up in the rear. [Obviously no calliope.] At two o'clock, the afternoon performance commenced. The opening was an overture by the band, followed by an equestrian performance in the ring, and before the riding was concluded, it was evident by the cheering of the audience, that the people were well pleased. The next act was a performance of trained ponies and a horse, conducted by Mr. James E. Cook. A wonderful feat of herculean strength was next exhibited by Andrew Gaffney, with iron balls, weighing respectively, 25, 35, 45, and 75 pounds. Mlle. McDonald then nimbly traipsed into the arena, and with a bow and a smile, vaulted a beautiful white steed, which she made with a grace seldom witnessed in the ring; her somersault act was most wonderful and daring. Mr. Charles Lowry's jockey riding which followed was perfection. The aerial bicycle riding by the De Coma Brothers, at the height of 50 feet, and the trapeze performance by the Misses Oswald and Alma, excited the admiration and wonder of all. A leap from the dizzy height of 50 feet, to a netting below, by one of the ladies, was most daring. As a whole, the performance was the best we have witnessed for a long time; and the company, from the proprietor to the humblest employee, were gentlemen and ladies in the highest sense. Be it further said that the season's success has depended much upon the manager, Mr. E. D. Colvin, who is the right man in the right place, and his courtesies to the press have caused many a word in his favor. Should Mr. Robbins visit this town another season his reputation will insure him a full tent." [Take that Norwalk, Connecticut!]

The show continued south, playing Glens Falls on September 4th. Ready to take advantage of any perceived advantage, Robbins changed his advertising to identify Colvin as the Assistant Manager. Colvin was a native of the general area and very well known. The ads also identified some new performers, i.e. Madame DeBerg, menage; Mons. Leopold,



with his Wonderful Barrel and Cross; Wentworth, the Man of Many Forms; and a Harry Wentworth (same gentleman, perhaps) who assisted John Foster, apparently in clowning.

On September 9th, the show was one hundred sixty miles to the west in Camden. Colvin was no longer mentioned in the ads, but a Jim Trowbridge, who was identified as an attaché of the show, was remembered as a notorious character in that area twenty-five years ago. It continued west, reaching Lydonville on September 13 and the following Monday, Suspension Bridge, a stone's throw from Ontario, at the western limits of New York state. Retracing its path, the show reached Geneva on September 18th. As this was Colvin's hometown and he was promoted to "Manager." In fact, he was identified in one article as "part owner" which is questionable. Maybe he was part-owner for the day only. In any event, the show was being challenged by John O'Brien's Six Big Shows, which was scheduled for September 23rd. The admission fee charged by Robbins varied at 25 cents or 50 cents depending upon the area being played. Often the advertising did not include mention of the admission price. I suspect that it was determined at the last minute by Robbins himself, depending on how he perceived the immediate demand. Robbins went right at O'Brien by advertising an admission reduction to 25 cents for the Geneva date. He got his share of the business with the night performance being fully subscribed. During that performance, George Cash presented Colvin with a stout, handsome ebony, gold-head cane which bore the following inscription, "Presented to E. D. Colvin by Geo. Cash, Charles Shields, Dr. Lynn, J. E. Farmer, Charles Smith." Except for Dr. Lynn, none the donors show up in any previous roster. It is assumed that these gentlemen were staffers on the show. The troupe continued on its trek eastward, playing the Mohawk Valley for five dates including Gloversville on September 27 where its growth was noted. The local press opined that the performance equaled the average of the big shows. For the final week of the season, the show

jumped sixty miles south east to the banks of the Hudson at Coxsackie on September 29 and closed out September at the fairly large town of Kingston, the former capital of New York. The local press called the parade "very creditable" with two bands of music, one of them black playing plantation music, ladies and gentlemen on horseback, elephants, a camel, dromedary, bear cubs, people dressed in grotesque costumes and other attractions. It also noted that James E. Cooke, the equestrian director, was presented with a very handsome gold and cameo medallion ring as a token of esteem from his colleagues. At New Paltz the next day high compliments were freely given by the locals. They included positive comments on the parade, the menagerie, and the circus performance. Also lauded was the lack of roughs and gamblers.

At Montgomery, the show used four wagons for country billing. Robbins closed out 1884 at Warwick, New York on October 5th. Apparently the performance remained intact to the end of the season as the local paper had the best of comments regarding the show. It noted that the leading actors and the band started for New York by special train after the evening performance while the rest of the company headed to the winter quarters at Frenchtown, New Jersey, about seventy miles south. Handing out tokens of appreciation seemed to be the rage as Robbins was given a gold watch and chain during the afternoon performance. After the evening performance, bandmaster Noble was given a gold headed cane and John Foster was given a cameo ring. All of this giving is an indication of camaraderie on the show. There would be other closings in the future that were not so harmonious. However, there is every indication that this season started on a high note and remained there throughout the entire season. Nothing succeeds like success.

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It has often been said that "No man is an island," and this tenet has never been more applicable than in the generation of the story of Frank A. Robbins. Good and valued help has been forthcoming from all directions throughout this lengthy research and writing project. The original idea came from Frank Mara, circus fan and Jersey City resident, who shared his notes and thoughts regarding Robbins. Then the process began by trying to learn where to look for information beyond the *Billboard*, *Clipper*, and *New York Dramatic Mirror*. This required putting together the 26 season routes. In this regard, the late Ted Bowman and John Polacsek have been most generous in sharing known routes and providing leads on others not previously developed. Joe Bradbury, Howard Tibbals, Richard Reynolds



and Richard Flint unhesitatingly shared their knowledge and memorabilia from their collections which contributed greatly to the final story. Cam Criddlebaugh, Jr. provided copies of 40 plus letters to and from Robbins that give invaluable insights in to the day to day thoughts of him and his contemporaries.

Fred Pfening, Jr. utilized his great resources to augment the writing with photographs and illustrations that greatly enhance the story. Grandson Frank A. Robbins, III and great-granddaughter Joan Robbins have been very enthusiastic in their support of this project. And last but by no means least, Fred Dahlinger. He has been literally a stream of ideas and information ever since I sat in his office a few years back discussing this article. To the folks listed above and the more than a hundred librarians scattered across a dozen states, my heartfelt gratitude. But you know what, I had more enjoyment than anyone in the pursuit of this undertaking. It has been an absolute pleasure.



# A DESCRIPTION OF THE 24TH OR YEAR 2000 MONTE-CARLO INTERNATIONAL CIRCUS FESTIVAL (AN AMERICAN IN MONACO)

BY A. H. SAXON

Without question, the Monte-Carlo International Circus Festival is an amazing achievement. When it was first proposed a quarter-century ago, there were many nay-sayers who claimed it would never succeed. But it did, thanks in large measure to the support of Prince Rainier III, who is himself a great circus buff and who, together with members of his family and friends, attends every performance he can and thereby lends tremendous prestige to the event. On occasion, I was told during a visit to the Festival in January of this year, he even shows up at rehearsals and, if he notices something that might be improved, suggests as much through one of his aides. And of course all such suggestions are immediately acted upon.

It is also Prince Rainier and his family who personally present the major awards to the artists who compete in the Festival: "Clowns d'Or" or "Golden Clowns" to the top acts, and "Clowns d'Argent" or "Silver Clowns" to those of somewhat lesser excellence. In addition to these two figural trophies, there is an abundance of lesser or "special" prizes awarded by such organizations as the French Club du Cirque; the Association Monégasque des Amis du Cirque; the Cercle Tristan Rémy (the organization of clowns named after the great historian who so admirably chronicled their history); plus well over a dozen other prizes and trophies bestowed by various organizations and individuals for such things as the most humane treatment of circus animals, music, the youngest circus artist, &c. &c.—with the result that virtually every act seen

during the Festival comes away from it with at least one prize. The awards that really count, however, are the Golden and Silver Clowns; and the gala performance at which these precious objects are bestowed has become, for the circus world, the equivalent of "Oscar" night for the movie industry.

The Prince, then—in much the same manner as did P. T. Barnum at his Greatest Show on Earth—has himself become a major, eagerly anticipated feature of the Festival. The performance never begins until he takes his seat in the box he and his guests occupy opposite the ring entrance; well before he enters the tent, spectators line up to get a good look at him while a gang of newspaper photographers, their cameras raised in readiness, crowd into the ring to stand directly in front of his box. Security personnel look nerv-

The "Chapiteau" or tent used during the Monte-Carlo International Circus Festival. The Princess Grace Rose Garden is in the foreground. Author's photo.

ously on; and when the Prince does appear—bareheaded, his white hair gleaming under the spotlights—the circus orchestra strikes up a special march. For the life of me, I can't recall the melody of this tune, which impressed me as being second-or third-rate Sousa; and there are even some lyrics relating to the circus attached to it ("Ils viennent du monde entier / Les gens de l'Univers Circus / . . . / Dzim, pam, poum / Les nains et les géants / On en a pour son argent," &c.), though fortunately I heard no one singing them. One wag I know even tried to convince me it was the Monégasque national anthem!

Anyway, to this rather flippant, albeit cheerful march the Prince makes his entrance, while all the spectators—standing, of course—clap in time to the music. He takes his seat, which is the signal for everyone else in the tent to do likewise; and the crowd of photographers, stationed only a few feet in front of him, are permitted to flash away for a good half-minute or so, an undoubtedly painful experience that,





in the tradition of *noblesse oblige*, he patiently endures. There is another "tradition" that becomes evident around this time—one that is shared especially by those "in the know" and thus possesses a kind of snob appeal. For it turns out there is an official Festival scarf, depicting, in red, white, and black, the face of the clown that appeared in the first Festival's posters and publicity materials, together with the outlines of other circus figures and the words "Festival International du Cirque Monte-Carlo" and "Principauté de Monaco." Now the "right" or correct side of this scarf has all these figures and the legends upon a white background, while the "wrong" or reversed side is predominately red. Before leaving Paris for Monaco, my wife and I were given two of these scarves by friends, with the admonition that they must be worn red or *wrong* side out, since that is the way the Prince always wears his! I looked at some photos in a book on the Festival, saw the Prince wearing his scarf the *right* side out, and said they must be wrong. Just wait and see, they insisted, and I had better trust them. I did, and they were correct after all: the Prince and everyone else in his party arrived wearing their scarves with the red side showing, and this particular affectation or, if one prefers, "tradition" is faithfully observed throughout the Festival.

The layout of the circus is impressive. This is a traditional single-ring show, and the "chapiteau" or tent is of the by-now familiar Italian design, supported by four lattice-work steel towers around the ring in place of poles, on each of which is a spotlight with its operator. But the substantial bleachers can accommodate no less than 4,000 spectators—over twice as many as at the Big Apple Circus—and most spectators occupy their own individual seats, with only a few rows of undivided benches toward the top. The circus orchestra, as is also traditional in such shows, is located above the rather high entrance to the ring; and the main entry or "front door" to the tent itself is approached through a tented corridor in which the various prizes are displayed in glass cases. Outside the big top are the cages and shelters for

the animals that participate in the acts, and one is perfectly free to watch the animals being fed and cared for, washed and scrubbed down in the case of the elephants, and even



Program for the 2000 Monte Carlo Festival. Al House collection.

to tramp through a little horse dung if that is one's particular liking. The wagons and concession stands authorized to sell food, drinks, and souvenirs are neatly arranged around the tent and without exception are clean and attractively decorated. In short, everything appears bright, gay, and wholesome, and there is nothing in the least shabby about the circus, its appendages, or its animals. And if there were, one imagines there might be a few shots fired from the ancient cannons that ring the Prince's palace on the "Rocher" or high rocky eminence that overlooks the circus grounds!

It seems almost futile to attempt to describe the various acts, many of which were among the very best I have ever seen. Only two or three struck me as being less than excellent, and one of these, I have no hesitation in declaring, was absolutely the *worst* of its kind I can recall seeing anywhere. To get this embarrassment out of the way as quickly as possible, this was the number with white tigers presented by William Vos, billed in the program as being from the Hawthorn Corporation of

the USA. These animals had been on display outside the tent and, for those who admire such washed-out, inbred freaks of nature, appeared attractive enough when simply lounging about in their cages. In the ring, however, it was another matter. The act was presented at a painfully slow pace; and one extremely fat, aged tiger in particular was so lethargic that I was reminded of the comedian Tim Conway in his slow-motion characterization of an old man. It would have come as no surprise to anyone if this overweight beast—who appeared, for obvious reasons, to be the trainer's favorite—had expired in the ring, thereby possibly injecting a little interest into the performance. What really spoiled this number, however, and might well have led to disaster, was the incredibly inept arrangement of the apparatus inside the cage. Throughout most of the act the pedestals and bridges on which the tigers were to make their final display were collapsed and lay toward the front of the cage, so that both the animals and their trainer had to keep jumping or stepping over them. They seemed almost to be performing amid the debris in a chromium junk yard. By the time Vos finally came to assemble this equipment for the grand finale, nearly everyone I knew had become bored and disgusted. When I later asked how such a number ever came to be included in the Monte-Carlo Festival, the answer I received was that formerly the Festival's directors had traveled around the world to view all the acts in advance, but that this was no longer done and some artists were now invited on the basis of "hearsay" and the recommendations of others. Time to reinstate the old system, I would say.

Although the Festival was scheduled to run for seven performances over as many days—including the formal gala at which the prizes were awarded, followed by a matinee for children and a final evening performance at which the "vainqueurs" or prize-winners performed—it was possible to see all of the individual numbers in the space of two consecutive performances. These are *long* performances by American standards, running close to three and



one-half hours, with a half-hour intermission. (Yes, the Prince retires from his box during the intermission; and yes, the same ceremony already described is repeated when he returns to his seat.) Traditional clown "entrées" or routines—traditional in the European sense, that is—may run on for a considerable length of time; and indeed there seems to be no pressure whatever to limit any act to some arbitrary number of minutes, at the end of which the ringmaster blows his whistle and another act comes rushing in. At Monte Carlo there are no whistles, and the pace is decidedly leisurely—which runs the risk of becoming tedious when watching an act like the one with the white tigers, or an entrée by clowns who are not very funny. On the plus side, considering the almost universal excellence of the artists and their numbers, more often this turns out to be an advantage, permitting one to enjoy some outstanding act far longer than one would be able to in a typical circus program.

Apropos of "longueurs," one thing that struck me as definitely in need of improvement was the "big cage" used for the cat acts. This was an old-style sectional cage that required several minutes and a sizable crew of workers to take down; and as there is but a single ring at Monte Carlo, this meant that, aside from the ringmaster's strolling about and chatting with the spectators, there was little else going on in the meantime. When I inquired why they did not use a wire-mesh cage that could be quickly dropped into the ring curb, I was told this could not be done since the acts come from "so many different circuses" and bring their own cages. Whether this explanation is valid or not, I won't presume to say.

One other minor complaint and then I have done with such observations. Since its beginning the Monte-Carlo Festival has been famous for the excellence of its circus bands, and this year's sizable Reto Parolari Orchestra was presumably no exception. I write "presumably" because, as in the case of the big cage, there is an obvious problem to consider. All those numbers coming from "so many different circuses" have their own

music and arrangements, naturally; and the great majority of them, as I observed, perform to *recorded* music. In their own circuses, perhaps, the music is live; but the music they bring with them to Monte Carlo is "canned." Consequently, there is hardly any music for the orchestra to play, and most of the time—with the exception of the march signaling the entrance of the Prince and one or two acts that do perform to live music—the musicians have nothing to do but sit atop the entrance to the ring silently watching the performance below. It occurred to me that all acts coming to Monaco ought to be required to perform to live music; but on reflection this would hardly be feasible. In the first place, even if they were to bring their own arrangements with them, the artists would need to spend time rehearsing with the orchestra, and this would add to their travel expenses and no doubt create other problems as well. And in the second place, nowadays a good many circuses around the world—no matter how outstanding their individual acts may be—have only the vaguest notion of what "live" music is to begin with.

The perennial "Monsieur Loyal" or ringmaster of the Festival, since its inception a quarter century ago, is the genial "Sergio" (Serge Spiessert), in a previous incarnation himself a clown at the famous Cirque Medrano as well as an actor who trained at the Paris conservatoire. For a number of seasons, too, he was a ringmaster with Ringling Bros., a period he has chronicled in an interesting volume of memoirs, *Cirque mon amour*, published in 1993. When not in Monaco, these days he can generally be found hosting a television special or presiding over some cabaret entertainment in Paris or elsewhere. The spectators themselves (and again, the tent being full, there were no less than 4,000 of them), throughout the performances I attended, were highly appreciative—at times wildly so. When something really pleased them, they would rapidly stamp their feet on the wooden floor of the bleachers, setting up a tremendous rolling noise that sounded like thunder. More often they clapped as loudly as they could, before settling into

that quaint custom that hails from the discriminating Soviet era—namely, rhythmic or, as I prefer to think of it, regimented clapping. This sometimes went on for an excessive amount of time—abetted by the performers themselves who, at the ends of their acts, remained in the ring, clapping back at the audience and thereby keeping the acclamation (for themselves? for the generous spectators?) going for as long as possible. I soon found it necessary to down an Aleve, and took care to bring earplugs with me to the second performance. At one point in the Saturday program, when the wild foot-stamping occurred in a particular section of the bleachers during a mediocre equestrian act, I thought I could detect a claque at work. A blatant attempt to influence the jurors, perhaps.

I was glad not to be among these last, for again, there were so many truly outstanding acts that it was impossible to rank them in any kind of precise order. After feeling confident one superb number I had witnessed was bound to win the "Clown d'Or," another just as good or better would almost immediately succeed, and then still another! No wonder the jury—which is no longer made up of celebrities such as Cary Grant but nowadays includes circus directors such as Bernhard Paul and Guy Laliberté—could not decide on single winners of the two major trophies. This is a quandary that, over the years, has become increasingly common and that almost leads one to suspect that the equivalent of the "grade inflation" prevalent in so many American schools is now manifesting itself at the Monte-Carlo Festival. Upon reflection, however, I really think this is not the case, for it is virtually impossible to compare many of these acts.

And in truth, I found little to disagree with in the jurors' final selections. There were no less than three "Clown d'Or" winners: (1) the American juggler Anthony Gatto, who presented a superbly rhythmic, fast-paced routine of almost infinite variety with balls, in addition to juggling as many as 12 rings and 7 torches; (2) the Tchernievski teeterboard troupe from Russia, whose



feats included somersaults on double and single stilts, and who at the end of their number unexpectedly broke into a delightful dance; and (3) the flying-trapeze and casting act from the Pyong Yang Circus of North Korea, which has appeared at the Festival several times in the past. This last troupe must be a real discouragement to the other artists showing up in Monaco, since almost inevitably it wins the "Clown d'Or." Its artists perform a simply fantastic routine—flying back and forth and over one another while performing somersaults, layouts, and twisters from trapeze bar to catcher-in-a-cradle to central platform in the tent's cupola above, before continuing on to a second trapeze and platform at the opposite side of the tent. One of these artists performs a beautiful triple pirouette while returning to the bar. Another star performer, a woman named Kim Hun He, is equally proficient at throwing not one, but *two* triple somersaults while making a single traverse of the apparatus. While watching this troupe I was reminded of some 19th-century American posters I have seen depicting trapeze acts whose artists, to an astonishing number, fly simultaneously through the air while performing seemingly impossible feats. In the past I had always considered such works pure fantasy. Now I am not so certain.

Coming in a close second with "Clowns d'Argent" were: (1) a wonderful display of strength, contortionism, and equilibrium by the duo "Vis Versa" (sic) from the Cirque du Soleil's *Quidam* production—in effect a "poses plastiques" or "living statues" presentation, but described in the program as an "acrobatic adagio"—that was one of the numbers I thought worthy of a "gold"; (2) the group of eight lions trained by Richard Chipperfield and presented by Martin Lacey, which, in contrast to the sorry presentation by Vos, was fast-paced and well coordinated and featured, in the course of a round-about series of jumps, some delightful "bouncing" off the wall of the cage; and (3) the Chinese acrobatic troupe from Hunan, whose members performed on several "mats" or vertical poles, running up and sliding down

them, somersaulting between them, &c. &c. Despite the large size of this troupe, there was hardly any sense of ensemble or well thought-out "program" to the act, and the artists performed little more than a series of uncoordinated, individual feats. I recall seeing a far better presentation of this kind at the Cirque du Soleil a few years back. The present number, in my opinion, might have appeared more attractive and interesting had the poles been disguised as palm trees and the acrobats costumed as monkeys. So dressed, they might even have plucked a few coconuts and pitched them in the direction of the Prince's box.

With the exception of the last act, I had no quarrel with the jury's selections, *all* of which easily merit "center-ring" status in any circus in the world. Of course, there were other numbers that were also quite marvelous in their own ways. The seven Asiatic elephants presented by Franco Knie (assisted by Sacha Houcke), for instance, exhibited the remarkable training one has come to expect from this Swiss family so famous for their work with animals. The elephants actually had two sepa-

tality for was the Russian barre act of the Boytsov. The star of this troupe, Igor Boytsov, has sometimes been termed the "Nureyev of the Ring"; and when I first saw him a year or two earlier, I was immediately reminded of another great ballet star, Nijinsky, and of the famous Ballets Russes with its superbly elegant costumes. Performed in perfect time to a stirring musical selection from the Romantic era, the act includes two attractive female acrobats who, after performing a few feats of their own on the bar, proceed to frame Boytsov with graceful ballerina-like poses that recall prints depicting not only scenes from the Romantic ballet but also some of the 19th-century circus numbers performed by such stars as Andrew Ducrow and his pretty wife Louisa Woolford. Boytsov himself, propelled to a tremendous height above the bar, performs leisurely, almost slow-motion layouts and pirouettes, and a triple somersault forms the climax of his routine. And again, everything is choreographed in perfect time to the music, which makes for a thrilling, as well as a splendidly theatrical, presentation. This number was one of

the most beautiful to be seen during the entire Festival. The reason it did not receive one of the "Clowns" may possibly be explained by the bar itself, which, as I first noticed during this performance, appears to be a good four inches or so in width. One French spectator wittily remarked that the act did not really employ a "barre," but more accurately a "boule-barre"!

There were also a number of highly unusual, eccentric acts, such as that of the Romanian contortionist "Venyamin," who resembled a "Slinky" in his metallic-looking, spring-like costume and performed almost as though he were the toy; and the Canadian Kai Leclerc, who did an ingenious "ceiling-walking" act in the course of which, while jauntily hanging upside-down at a fearful height above the ring, he somehow managed to juggle three balls. An unusual, rather complicated high-wire act by the Russian artist Khatchatrian was spoiled by the use of the safety wire or



Ticket for the 2000 Monte Carlo Festival. Al House collection.

rate routines that were presented at alternate performances. At the beginning of the one routine, a single elephant entered the ring from backstage balancing on a huge rolling globe or ball; in the second the entire group performed a most unusual liberty act—waltzing, executing the "pas espagnol," trotting in line around the perimeter of the ring—of the sort one expects to see performed by horses, hardly elephants. A very amusing and at the same time daring trampoline number was performed by three Romanian artists known as the "Trio Fantastico."

One other act I had a definite par-



"lunge"—a device that ought to be reserved exclusively for training sessions—and a "quintuple haute école" number from the Gran Circo Mundial of Spain, while displaying considerable dash and color, suffered from a lack of coordination among the horses and their riders, as well as some pretty obvious unevenness in such matters as the height, tempo, and precision with which the horses executed their various steps and maneuvers.

And then there were the clowns. My good friend Pierre Robert Levy, who is the undisputed authority on this subject, informed me he was not impressed by any of them—which confirmed my own less experienced opinion. One featured "entrée" especially was much too long and involved a great deal of business that was so unexpected and outwardly obscene that I couldn't help laughing at the superb effrontery of the artist involved. The members of this troupe wore the traditional baggy pants, and the clown in question repeatedly yanked at the crotch of his oversize garment—furiously pulling it, with great, exaggerated movements, up and down, from side to side, and in and out between his legs, looking for all the world as though he were masturbating! This is one act that, even by present-day standards of morality and the television commercials inflicted on us by a flaccid Bob Dole, I don't think we can expect to see any time soon at

Ringling Bros. In case some persons may think I am libeling this traditional feature of the circus that so often falls, metaphorically as well as literally, on its face, I will add that I saw some very decent-looking, well-behaved clowns at the Festival who spent most of their time *outside* the tent. These were members of the "Cercle Tristan Rémy" who formed a first-rate clown band that played before the performance.

Despite the few minor reservations that I have felt compelled to note, I have no hesitation in declaring that at Monte Carlo one is able to see the greatest concentration of outstanding circus talent that is to be found anywhere on earth. The Festival is the Mecca of the circus world, to which all true devotees of the entertainment should make at least one pilgrimage during their lifetimes. Don't expect encouragement to do so from circus directors and artists themselves, however. For once having gone there, Americans especially are unlikely to be satisfied with at least ninety percent of the ragtag shows and ludicrously inept acts that are foisted upon the public as "circus" in their country. That is the price one must be prepared to pay after coming face to face with true excellence.

*For those wishing to visit Monaco and attend the Festival, two good sources of information are the Monaco Government Tourist Office in New York (1-800-753-9696) and*

*Cyber Monaco on the Internet (www.cyber-monaco.mc). Information on performance dates and how to go about ordering tickets may also be obtained through these sources. Despite its small size, Monaco possesses a surprising variety of hotels, restaurants, and cultural attractions, and persons attending the circus festival should plan on spending at least an additional day or two taking in the other sights. There is a shop that sells souvenirs of the Festival; and very often there are exhibits of art relating to the circus held in conjunction with it. Air France and Delta, besides offering several package deals, fly from the U.S. directly to Nice, and the short distance from the airport to Monte Carlo is easily covered by bus or helicopter. The Monaco heliport, in fact, is adjacent to the circus lot, and a number of hotels send buses to meet their guests there. One can also travel to Monte Carlo by train. Many circus artists and visitors to the Festival stay at the Abela Hotel, which is in the rather staid Fontvieille district of Monaco directly across a small park (itself adjacent to the Princess Grace Rose Garden) from the circus tent. But there are a great number of other hotels only a short taxi or bus ride away in Monte Carlo proper, which is a more interesting and exciting area of the principality—unless, of course, one happens to be a hopelessly unreconstructed circus fan!*

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**SEPTEMBER 7, 8, and 9, 2000**



# FROZEN CUSTARD

## and the Circus

By Robert J. Loeffler, Ph.D.

A confection closely associated with ice cream is frozen custard. People who attended a circus, carnival, street fair or resort pier in the early 1900s remember buying a five-cent dish or cup of frozen custard. However, very few of the younger generation have heard or tasted this confection. The public became acquainted with frozen custard in the early years of the 20th century through the circus.

There is a good deal of confusion as to what constitutes frozen custard. Frank M. Buzzell in 1909 stated that: "The term ice cream as used in this country is a rather broad one, including the product of many formulas which are prepared in several ways. The main divisions are: 1. The plain ice cream, frequently known as New York or Philadelphia ice cream; a plain and raw article, rarely or never containing eggs, being composed of simply cream of variable butter fat content, sugar in rather uniform quantities, and almost always containing gelatin or some other gelatin binder. 2. The French or Neopolitan ice cream, which contains eggs in addition to the cream and sugar, being virtually a frozen custard and as such admitting of great detailed variation."

According to Dr. Harvey W. Wiley (1912), custard is custard because of the addition of eggs: "A mixture of fresh, wholesome eggs with cream, may properly be offered to the consumer under the name of frozen custard, without deception and without injury."

Dr. J. H. Frandsen, distinguished frozen custard and ice cream authority, states: "Frozen Custard is high in egg yolk solids which are cooked to a custard before freezing. It is medium to high in milk fat and milk solids--not fat. Ice cream is medium to high milk fat and milk solids--not fat. It can be with or without egg products."

Most dairy experts agree with I. E. Wissinger, former chief, Dairy

Statistics Branch, Agricultural Estimates Division, U. S. Department of Agriculture, when he wrote (March 13, 1959), "that the minimum requirements of 5 dozen egg yolks per gallon of custard separates it from most ice cream. Therefore, practically all frozen custard production is included in the ice cream figures."

As to the origin and early history of frozen custard, there is meager information. Professors Frandsen, Lucas and A. C. Dahlberg, all dairy experts, are of the opinion that to date (1961) no single person can rightly be credited with the perfection of the first frozen custard recipe because, as Buzzell points out, frozen custard was merely a dessert custard that was frozen. Water ices, cream ices, fruit sherbets, and other frozen desserts date to the time of Marco Polo, and earlier. Ice cream, itself, was known in France at the time of Louis XIV. Many housewives made milk desserts, water and milk ices,

The Kohr custard stand in Atlantic City, New Jersey in 1928. Author's collection.



ice cream and custards at an early date in America. No doubt someone made homemade custard and either accidentally or purposely decided to cool it; the result became known as frozen custard. The development of frozen custard was more of an evolution than anything else. The General Mills Corporation in 1968 investigated the matter and discovered the earliest reference to homemade custard is found in 1886 in *Sense in the Kitchen*, by Abbey Merrill Adams. A 1905 cookbook, *The Buckeye Cook Book*, "sold only by subscription," also mentions custard. Frandsen goes on to explain that "frozen custard represents the more expensive form of ice cream."

Frandsen and Lucas, first observed frozen custard being dispensed at a circus in the mid-1890s; these two experts discovered this independently. Frandsen explained that: "The custard concession was often right out in the open. They didn't seem to bother with a tent. I think it was sold mostly as a midway proposition outside the circus tent and on the coming and going of the people to the show. I do not have a clear picture in my mind as to how the freezer was operated, but since they were doing it on a large scale, I certainly believe that it was mechanically operated, but it was the type of upright freezer packed with crushed ice and salt very much on the order of the hand, home operated freezer. Later a crude type of wooden platform was hastily erected and the freezer placed on the ground behind it and out of view of the customers. Later a small canvas tent with three sides with the cones on the counter space was used; sometimes an awning was placed over the custard stand and still later at night the stand was illuminated with a bright electric light. Little or no attempt was made to sell it in the big top because it was a soft-serve confection and it would have melted away to a 'soup' by the time the candy butchers delivered it to the patrons on the bleachers or reserved seats. The custard was usually sold in a cheap China dish and later in a cone or paper cup in more recent times. It cost a nickel at first and then a dime."

Frozen custard has always been



associated with circuses, carnivals, fairs and resort piers. These events attract large numbers of patrons. Harry J. Kimpel, executive secretary of the Soft-Serv Dairy Products Association, indicated, "Frozen Custard, as I understand it, did originate with the circus--it was an entirely different product in the early days than later on when nuts, spices and bits of candy were added to the mix." Paul D. Graning stated that: "[I]t prior to 1937 a product known as frozen custard. Its sale, however, was limited to circuses and spots such as the pier at Atlantic City, New Jersey."

In a nutshell, the history of frozen custard in America is characterized first by the appearance in the 1890s of itinerant vendors or concessionaires who plied their wares near the circus grounds. In those days the recipe for frozen custard was considered secret by some in the fledgling industry. Many times the independent vendor, since he couldn't gain access to some of the better recipes, made up his own. Custard "boomed" at circuses, carnivals, fairs, and resort piers around 1920, and it continued to flourish into the 1930s and 1940s. After that its popularity waned but never completely disappeared from the American scene. It is still available in cities such as Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and one Wisconsin-based fast food chain offers frozen custard on its menu. Even the Kohr Brothers (to be discussed shortly) returned to their roots with this headline in the York, Pennsylvania, paper: "Kohr's Coming Back to York. Frozen Custard store opens shop at the Galleria Mall." The date is October 29, 1996.

In the 1920s frozen custard was prepared in a batch freezer. In other words, the circus butcher, vendor or concessionaire or local merchant prepared a large quantity of custard in a batch as soon as he arrived on the circus lot in anticipation of warm weather and a large crowd which usually spelled huge profits. With the production of a large amount in a batch freezer it

was necessary that the butchers or vendors sell practically all of it because the freezer was not designed to hold any of the custard not sold that day. Inclement weather and the



An illustration from a Port Morris Machine and Tool Works 1929 brochure. The first Miller unit on Ringling-Barnum was a Morris machine. Courtesy Charles Erickson, Port Morris Machine and Tool Works.

absence of a large crowd forced the operator to dispose of his product at a financial loss. The high egg, milk, and sometimes cream content of the custard, along with high summer temperatures, added to the possibility of spoilage due to bacteria, fungi and even animal parasites; this contamination came from within as well as from outside the custard.

In the early days of frozen custard sales there was no such thing as a franchise; that came several years later.

Eventually, others realized that huge profits could be made from selling frozen custard. It also became evident that a better freezer was needed to hold the custard for longer periods. Some of the early firms to build such a freezer were the Henry, Millard & Henry Company of York, Pennsylvania (from 1905 to 1936); Kohr Brothers (1919); the General Equipment Mfg. Company; the Novelty Freezer Company, Brooklyn, New York; and the Port Morris Machine Company, New York. All these companies were interested in developing an apparatus that could mix, hold (by refrigeration) and dispense the frozen custard. The custard equipment used by all of these companies trace their roots to the Kohr machine. Earlier than that the Henry, Millard & Henry Company

produced an ice cream freezer that was most successful, but this firm never marketed custard. However, the Kohr invention was an advancement over the Henry, Millard & Henry freezer.

Information about Elton Kohr and his brothers was difficult to ferret out, but with the help of the late Tom Parkinson, Frank P. Thomas, and several others there emerged a picture of the role the enterprising Kohr and his brothers played in the custard story. Elton Kohr was a native of York, Pennsylvania, and in 1916 he wanted to prepare his own custard in the cellar of his father's home. His dad refused, so the elder Kohr built a home for Elton and his family where he could make as much custard as his heart desired. In the beginning (1919) Kohr prepared his own custard mix. As business grew, a local dairy was convinced to supply the mix. As time passed, Kohr's recipe became the standard for the trade. Young Elton Kohr peddled his soft, frozen custard dessert door to door in York, and until a few years ago [1990] there was a stand at the York fair.

The Kohr business really got underway when it acquired a newly patented gasoline-powered ice cream machine from Henry, Millard & Henry, and began producing what it called "Frozen Dessert," which later became known as "Kohr's Frozen Custard." Therefore, before Elton Kohr produced his own custard machine, he used an ice cream freezing unit built by fellow neighbors, Henry, Millard & Henry.

An ad in the *Billboard* for March 24, 1928, clearly indicates that the Henry, Millard & Henry Company was already selling the Eze-Freeze custard machine coast to coast and in Canada. Their machine was driven by a gas-powered engine. The company was founded in 1905 by Joseph T. Henry and his brother, Charles T. and Brooks Millard. They next manufactured a freezer called the "Advance Gasoline Freezer." The company dissolved in 1936. Henry lived in retirement in York. However, the company reorganized to become the Brandt-Henry Manufacturing Company and continued to build freezers and special machinery.

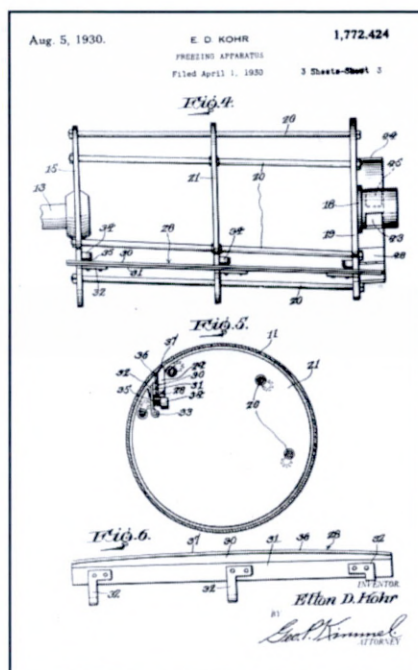


Neither company ever made or sold frozen custard mix. The York city directory lists the Eze-Freezer Automatic Freezer for the first time in the 1931-1932 and 1933-1934 issues; between 1933 and 1934 the firm came out with the "Master Freezer" and Brandt-Henry continued in business until 1954. Data is scant on this company, too. However, all of the companies, individuals and organizations contacted for this article indicated clearly that Elton Kohr and his brothers produced both the recipe for the custard mix and machine to freeze and dispense custard. It appears that a machine that mixes, holds, and dispenses frozen custard is the one most circuses and others wanted to make the concession profitable.

Kohr literature indicated it had made custard as early as 1919. It is unclear when they first used the Henry, Millard & Henry machine but it was probably between 1922 and 1925. Kohr didn't apply for a patent until 1930 when he discovered he was in a very competitive field.

Elton Kohr and his brothers' custard business was so successful in and around York that about 1926 they decided to introduce frozen custard to resort centers along the eastern seaboard. The first place selected was the Steel Pier, Atlantic City. At that time there were fourteen men and women in their employ. It was a thriving business. Elton Kohr decided to move northward to the Bronx where he met Irving Goldstein. Goldstein wrote that Kohr came to Coney Island in either 1926 or 1927 and set up a concession stand and "he wanted me to go into business but I was busy enough myself, so I referred him to a dairy dealer, Max Bloom."

Bloom agreed to supply the Kohr operation with milk, sometimes cream and other ingredients for the frozen custard. Bloom, after seeing how successful Kohr was doing, became interested in the custard business and he also used a Kohr machine. As far as is known, Kohr and his brothers continued to run a custard stand in Coney Island for many years. In either 1928 or 1929 Kohr sent two agents to Venice,



Patent issued to E. D. Kohr in 1930.  
Author's collection

California, (Kohr himself might have been one of the agents) where the two set up a custard outlet in that seaside resort city. An outlet was also obtained in Long Beach.

Mary V. Taylor, of Venice, decided to start a custard business with her husband. She indicated that when Kohr first came to Venice, he had the barrel-type machine which used ice and salt for freezing which was very similar to the home hand-cranked ice cream freezer. The second Kohr machine that the Taylor's used was a Kohr electric model. The Taylors next moved to Santa Cruz, California, and introduced frozen custard to that area.

According to Frank P. Thomas, the original Kohr brothers machine was little more than a home freezer turned over on its side with the barrel horizontal. Mix and air were pumped into one end and the frozen product discharged from the other end. The outer shell, which contained the brine water, was actually made of wood as were home freezers.

It was mounted on a stand off the ground. Kohr eventually went to a fixed barrel about which the brine circulated from a separate tank using a pump. This tank was refrigerated by an ammonia compressor and these machines were used at

Chicago's Century of Progress fair in 1933.

Thomas started to build custard machines in 1930. He made improvements on Kohr's original design, and the resulting machine was the first one which operated continuously with a stationary barrel: the salt and ice circulate around the barrel by an impeller which paralleled the bell or freezing chamber in the machine entirely.

On April 1, 1930, Elton Kohr filed for a patent application, Serial No. 440,392, for "A Freezing Apparatus" and, the patent was granted on August 5, 1930 for an electrically operated custard machine. Kohr claimed the following in his patent: "1. This invention relates to a freezing apparatus, and has for its primary object to provide, in as hereinafter set forth, an apparatus for producing ice cream, frozen custard and the like in a continuous operation. 2. A further object of the invention is to provide a freezing apparatus for the purpose aforesaid, in which the ingredients to be frozen are fed into one end of a cylinder rotating mounted within a refrigerant container, and in which the frozen product is discharged from the opposite end of the cylinder. 3. In which novel means employed for agitating the contents of the cylinder and for working the same toward the discharge end of the cylinder. 4. Which is particularly designed to prevent waste, and in which the rotatable cylinder is free from any structure arranged concentrically thereto and extending lengthwise thereof in order to move any tendency of the frozen product to collect at the center of the cylinder."

On December 2, 1930, the U.S. Patent Office issued Patent No. 1,783,799 to Elton Kohr for a "Mold for forming cones for ice cream and frozen custard." An application was filed on March 20, 1930, and on September 23, 1930, he was similarly granted a patent (Design Number 82,094) for the "Design for a Frozen Product Machine Front." According to the design patent, Kohr was the assignor of Kohr's Custard Stores, Inc. York, Pennsylvania, a Delaware corporation.

The *Billboard* carried an ad on



April 7, 1928, for the Novelty Freezer Company of Brooklyn, New York. The company was listed in the *Brooklyn City Directory* for the first and last time in the issue designated "winter 1926-1927" which was published on October 6, 1926, and their address was 9315 Farragut Rd., Brooklyn.

During the mid-1930s the Thomas Company machines were mounted on either a trucks or a truck trailer and located at most circus, carnival and fair lots in various cities across America.

E. W. (Slim) Wells, at one time general manager of the William Collins Shows carnival was associated with Al G. Barnes Circus in either 1928, 1929, or 1930. Wells in an interview indicated that there was a frozen custard concession on the lot the years he worked for the circus. It was undoubtedly a Kohr machine.

General Equipment Manufacturing & Sales Company, Inc. indicated the company supplied circuses with frozen custard machines in the 1930s so they could well have sold some to Sells-Floto Circus in 1931 and 1932. Joe Bradbury, in his two-year history of that circus, reproduced W. H. Woodcock, Sr.'s wagon list for 1932 in which a "Frozen custard truck" is included. The company also sold custard machines to Cole Bros. Circus between 1935 and 1940.

This advertisement appeared in the February 20, 1937 *Billboard*: "Will Lease For the Coming Season Frozen Custard Privilege on the Russell Bros. Circus. Equipment must be first-class and up to date. Would like to hear from Sober, reliable butchers. Write Albert McCabe, Care Deanbrooke Hotel, Cleveland, Ohio. McCabe was legal adjuster as well as concession manager for the Russell Circus in 1937. In 1938 Vern Campbell was manager of the concessions and had a number of butchers working for him selling custard. Nearly all circuses of any size had custard machines during the 1930s and 1940s.

Charles H. Erickson of the Port Morris Machine Company of New



The original Frozen Delight truck on Ringling-Barnum in 1934. Circus World Museum collection.

York began making frozen custard machines in 1929. He sold several Electro-Freeze machines to Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus (probably Miller Brothers Concession Company).

In light of what has been written, it is obvious the Elton Kohr and his brothers experienced keen competition in the sale of custard machines. It was this sort of thing, plus other policies, that forced Kohr to obtain patents in 1930. Of course, most concession companies and/or circuses probably didn't have more than one machine, except the larger shows.

In 1929 Frank C. and Paul Miller operated concessions on the Ringling-Barnum Circus, Frank C. was referred to as "the frozen custard king." In 1930 Frank C. and Paul operated the frozen custard stand on the same circus. The same was true for the 1934 and 1935 tenting seasons. In 1935 both were involved with a frozen custard truck, a deluxe diner and an eating diner.

On December 24, 1935 Frank Miller signed a contract with Ringling-Barnum granting him an exclusive license for selling frankfurters, frozen custard and other foods in two automobile wagons on the midway and at refreshment stands outside the tents located on the exhibition grounds and selling refreshments in-side the main tent and menagerie, such as soft drinks, peanuts, popcorn, and lemonade during the 1936 season commencing with the opening of the Boston engagement.

The rent was \$3,000 per week,

payable weekly. Miller was to deposit \$15,000 as a guarantee. All Miller employees fed by the circus were charged \$7 per week, per person.

During the 1936 season both men operated concessions for Ringling and both are listed as managers of the candy department which surely included custard. The young and energetic concessionaires were known as the Miller Brothers Concessions. The personnel for the frozen delight concession in 1936 included: Jack (Slim) Harris, manager; Walter Moriarity, assistant; John (Hans) Hoffman, assistant; Jimmy Hunt, equipment; Virgil Doyle, canvas superintendent; and Fred Mills, mixer.

The following season Frank C. and Paul Miller shared the position of superintendent of concessions on Howard Y. Bary's Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus of Peru, Indiana. Frank Miller supervised "privileges, except novelties for the show."

On January 10, 1938 Ringling-Barnum general manager Carl Hathaway wrote to John M. Kelly: "We have been giving the matter of Miller Bros. as concessionaires a great deal of thought, as we are pressed for room. Their equipment alone takes nearly a flat car which we must have or add another car. For this reason we are asking you to notify Frank and Paul Miller that we will not be able to sell them any concessions with the show.

"We have worked out a plan where we can handle these to advantage and save a great deal of space which otherwise might cause us to enter the one hundred car class of circuses, which will amount to about \$700 a day."

However, the Millers were back as usual for the 1938 season, but the price went up to \$1,100 per week with a deposit of \$5,500.

Both brothers were with Ringling in 1939. The agreement between Frank and Paul Miller, doing business as the Miller Bros. Concession Company was not signed until April of 1939.



The agreement listed the following equipment:

Front yard on midway: One lunch wagon truck. Two candy stands. Three combined hamburger and hot dog stands. Three novelty stands. One candy floss and popcorn stand. One frozen custard truck.

In the menagerie: Three combined floss and popcorn stands. One novelty stand.

In back yard: One combined coffee and lunch stand.

During the Madison Square Garden stand the amount paid to the show was \$5,100, \$1,000 for novelties and \$4,100 for other concessions. Thereafter, until July 1, 1939 the sum was \$4,500, divided as \$1,000 for novelties and \$3,500 for other concessions. The deposit was \$15,000. The agreement terminated on July 1, 1939, but was extended. The Millers had the option of transporting separately from the circus train movement.

The custard wagon was carried on flatcar #133 between 1935 and 1956, except 1945 and 1948. Miller brothers called their frozen product Frozen Delight instead of the customary frozen custard. This name change baffled me; however, the mystery was finally solved after locating an article about frozen custard by C. H. Manville, former Commissioner, Food and Drug Department, Jefferson City, Missouri, published in the *Ice Cream Review* in 1931 where Manville wrote: "More than a year ago a product appeared in Missouri as 'Frozen Custard,' 'Frozen Delight' and 'Angel Delight.'" Manville's statement clarified the point that frozen custard was often sold by different names.

Miller brothers concessions on the Ringling lot used "Frozen Delight" more than "Frozen Custard." The reasons for this may be: 1. Miller brothers may have used the name frozen delight to differentiate



The custard brand name on Downie Bros. Circus in the early 1930s was Mellow Whip. Bob MacDougall collection.

their frozen product from the Frozen Custard sold by concessionaires on other circuses and outlets. 2. Some Dairy Queen and Tastee Freeze operators today feel that some people weren't attracted to a product with custard in its name. In some places, such as Missouri (1930), the latter name was preferred for the same confection, and also in some southern cities. This was not true of Milwaukee, Wisconsin; York, Pennsylvania; and other cities where frozen custard is firmly implanted to this day. 3. The name, frozen delight, conveys a lighter, more appealing confection. Actually in the late 1930s and early 1940s, some of the richer and more expensive ingredients were

The Frozen Delight wagon on the midway of the Hagenbeck-Wallace-Forepaugh-Sells Circus in 1935. Pfening Archives.



omitted from frozen custard, and after sampling the lighter confection, people liked it and continued to buy it under that name.

Another unusual thing took place in regard to the use of the terms frozen custard and frozen delight that should be addressed. During the

same period from about 1936 to 1955 the route books of the Ringling show usually referred to the confection as frozen delight, except for the 1945-1948. At this time the term frozen custard usually remained in place on circus wagons and other confection vehicles dealing with frozen custard (1950, 1951, 1952, 1954, 1955 and 1956).

Mitchell Gorrow, long-time circus fan, wrote an article in 1949 on improvements in the big circus. He stated that, "The midway diner and custard wagon are now in place opposite the side show entrance." In a later communication he indicated that most people called this confection frozen custard. It is difficult to understand why this discrepancy occurred on the same circus (Ringling Brothers), but if the Miller brothers considered their use of frozen delight a "trademark" item then, their marketing office naturally sent such data for enclosure in the Ringling route books. In like manner, circus personnel stayed with the more familiar name, frozen custard.

Frank and Paul Miller were still in charge of confection concessions on Ringling in 1940, but by this year the company name became Miller Brothers Coastal Trading Company, an apt name in light of the fact that it and the circus wintered quartered in beautiful Sarasota, Florida. Again, in 1941 and 1942 both brothers had concession stands on Ringling-Barnum. Frozen Delight personnel in 1941 included



Percy Anderson, manager; William Miller and Abe Finkelstein, helpers. The Gordon Potter loading order at Chicago on April 10, 1941 reveals that flatcar #145 carried an unnumbered Frozen Custard vehicle.

In 1942 both Millers were in charge of the show's concession department in which frozen delight was still a strong confection item. J. Hoffman was manager of the frozen delight stand.

By 1943 the company's name was changed again to Miller Brothers Concession Company. The officers were: Frank C. Miller and Paul Miller, owners; Jack Harris, assistant; Frank Morris, purchasing agent; James Horsburgh, ice man; Bill White, stock man; Clifford Porter, bottles; Oliver Hill, porter; Pat Connally, personnel. The Frozen Delight stand was managed by H. Hoffman.

In 1942 Max Miller joined his older brothers in their concession company as an assistant cashier of the candy top; James Mel Hamlin was manager; E. Meyers was manager of the frozen delight concession. In 1945 H. Hamlin was manager; J. Amico and H. Terhune were his helpers.

The Ringling route books for 1946, 1947, and 1948 list the frozen confection as frozen custard. In the latter year Max Miller was manager. Miller continued as manager in 1949.

The 1950 route book lists the Miller Brothers Concession Company as still managing all concessions on the Ringling show and the same men took charge of the frozen delight stand. The train loading sequence, at least at one point in the summer tour, listed the Frozen Custard truck on flat car #104.

In 1951 the same personnel operated the frozen delight truck. In 1952 the frozen delight unit was #64, carried on flatcar #229. (56) The next touring season (1953) found the Frozen Custard truck #48 loaded on flat car #12.

For the tenting season of 1954 and 1955 the route book lists frozen delight as one of



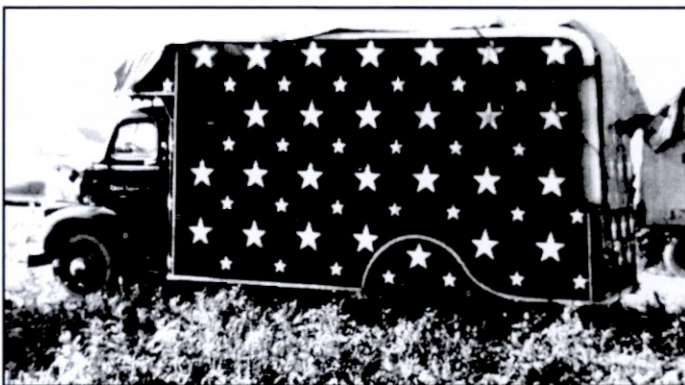
The custard wagon on Cole Bros. Circus in 1937. Pfening Archives.

the refreshment choices. Max Miller continued as manager.

The Miller brothers long connection with the Greatest Show on Earth continued until its last under canvas in 1956. However, frozen custard was no longer sold on the circus. Willis Lawson, managed the concession department with Gunter Fritke as assistant and Mel Hamilton as bookkeeper.

Frank P. Thomas and others in the Soft-Serv industry today believe that Elton Kohr was the originator of the idea to market frozen custard on a large commercial scale. He was the first to invent an apparatus to mix and then dispense the product from

The second custard truck on Ringling-Barnum was much smaller. Pfening Archives.



the other end of the machine. This development eventually led to the present day Soft Serv industry Dairy Queen and Tastee Freeze.

As time marched on in the frozen custard trade, more ingredients were added such as more eggs, fat, fruit, spice, nuts, and bits of candy. It was sold in a soft or semi-hard form from an electrically operated machine.

Paul Graning of the Dairy Queen National Development Company explained why the early custard passed out of existence for all practical purposes and it never gained the real popularity of ice cream because of "of the extremely high butter fat content (22-44%); the high over-

run (100%), so it did not take hold as a permanent fixture in the American way of life." The high caloric content is a consideration today.

Circus historian Robert MacDougall states that: "The first year Frozen Delight was on Ringling-Barnum was 1931 (ref. *National Geographic Magazine*, October). It was mounted in a Autocar truck and supplied its own power via a generator set mounted in the front section of the truck. The original truck was used until 1940, with a few changes in body configurations. A shorter GMC truck was then used with a completely different body. This truck served through 1952. Another Chevy truck and another new body was used through 1954. My research shows that the only name used was Frozen Delight never Frozen Custard. I have heard that Frozen Custard was a scab concession that operated off the circus lot but near by. It did not actually travel with the show itself."

Miller brothers coined several names for their company--Miller Brothers Concessions, Snow-Cap Products, Inc., and Coastal Trading Company. It is also possible that Mitch Gorrow and others referred to the cus-





The third custard truck on Ringling-Barnum. Bob MacDougall collection.

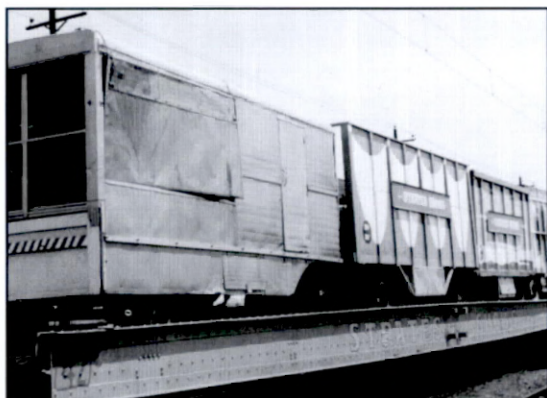
tard or delight vehicle as a wagon when it was really a truck. Exceptions seem to be found on Cole Bros. Circus in 1935 and small circuses.

Some frozen concessions appeared on truck circuses in the 1930s. One was on Downie Bros.

A loading order for Cole Bros. Circus in 1935 lists a frozen delight wagon #120 on flat car #61. By 1937 the frozen delight machine had been installed in the steel dropped frame wagon built by the Kingham Trailer Company in 1935 to carry Jumbo II. It was given the number 64 and continued to be used on the show through the 1939 season.

Although no longer sold on circuses, soft ice cream continued to be

The custard wagon on the Strates carnival. Bill Hall photo, Al Stencel collection.



available on a number of large carnivals in the 1950s.

After the 1955 Ringling season the Miller brothers custard truck was sold to Bobby Hassan who operated it on the Royal American Shows at least through the 1960s. They continued to advertise it as Frozen Delight.

A Frozen Delight machine was located in a concession tent on the Cetlin & Wilson midway in the early 1950s.

A custard truck was on the World of Mirth carnival in the 1960s. In 1949 a custard wagon was on the James A. Strates carnival.

Personal thanks and deep appreciation are extended to the following: the late Tom Parkinson, who, himself, was interested in many of the topics I have written about over the years. Parkinson suggested I tackle many of them in the mid-1950s when I used to visit him in Chicago.

Parkinson was a constant supporter and source of information. He freely shared with me and many others. I owe him so very much.

The late Robert Parkinson, archivist and historian of the Circus World Museum, provided working space and expertise at a time when the library was still in its infancy. Through his help and



Frozen Delight truck on the Royal American Shows in the 1960s. Al Stencel collection.

knowledge I gleaned a wealth of information.

To Fred Dahlinger, director of collections and research at the Circus World Museum, willingly provided answers to my many questions. The following reference libraries were helpful: the National Archives and Record Service and the Enoch Pratt, Baltimore, were very helpful. Moorhead Public Library and University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill, North Carolina; Public Library and Historical Museum, York, Pennsylvania; Harry J. Kimpel, Executive Secretary, Soft-Serv Dairy Products Association; Paul Graning, Dairy Queen National Development Corporation; Irving Goldstein; Mary V. Taylor; E. G. Slim Wells; Charles Johnston; Charles H. Erickson, Port Morris Machine Corporation and Tool Works, New York; J. Reboli, Gumpert Company; Robert Litherland, Dairy Queen operator, for his accuracy on historical facts about the frozen food industry.

To my wife, Jane, who has struggled with these circus histories much as I have over the past couple of years; without her invaluable aid and know-how, these histories would not be completed today. Her computer knowledge has made the task somewhat easier, although it was still a huge job.



# Side Lights On The Circus Business

## PART THIRTEEN

By David W. Watt

*Editor's Note: The dates listed are the days the article appeared in the Janesville, Wisconsin Gazette.*

### January 3, 1914

A few days ago I met an old friend on the street and immediately he commenced telling me how he enjoyed my Saturday night articles on show business, but he said: "Do you know, Dave, I've often wondered why you quit the business?"

Well for a moment, as the saying goes, he had me in a corner, for I was needed with the show and so far as my part of it was concerned I knew it as well as anyone when the show closed that season at Richmond, Virginia. After repeatedly refusing to sign a contract for another season with Mr. Cooper and Mr. McCaddon.

Mr. James A. Bailey of the Barnum Show came in and calling me to one side asked me if I had not better conclude to come back next season.

He said, "Mr. Cooper tells me that you don't seem to be satisfied here." He said, "Now Dave, if you think you ought to have a little more money we'll give it to you, for we would rather have you in the wagon than anyone we know of, for when you are there that part of the show is off our minds, for we know it will be well cared for."

He said, "You don't need to make up your mind today, but we will keep the position open for you until the last of January or the first of February, and perhaps by that time you will think better of it and want to go out next season just the same, for I would be glad to have you come back and stay as long as I have a show."

But I had seemed to get tired of the long hours, and there was usually nearly an hour in the afternoon and the same at night that I had to work like an eighteen hour train between Chicago and New York, and I thought this was telling on me and that I

might come home and find something that I might like better. I finally concluded not to go out the following season; and two or three years later they took over the Sells Brothers' Show and then sent for me to come on to Columbus, Ohio, which was the winter quarters of the Sells show, as manager representing Mr. Bailey's interest. But I did not think I could get away just at that time so I turned down chance number two. And so it went on and I never got back into the business again.

Showmen all over the country, wherever they happen to be, have their Christmas trees just the same as other folks, and while some trees are larger than others, they all have some kind of a Christmas. The largest one that I knew of this year was held at the Gunter Hotel in San Antonio, Texas, to which eight hundred invitations were issued. In addition to the regular tree and festivities was an annual Christmas tree celebration and banquet for the showmen of the country who are spending the winter in San Antonio.

There were not many outsiders present, but there were several

James Cooper, partner of James A. Bailey. Pfening Archives.



hundred members of show companies in San Antonio for the holidays. Manning P. Pletz, who had charge of the invitations and the arrangements for both the Christmas tree and the showmen's dinner, is a veteran manager of such affairs as this latest enterprise. He was assisted by his brother, J. Fred Pletz, and by showmen generally.

Mrs. Percy Tyrrell, wife of the proprietor and manager of the Gunter Hotel, gave Mr. Pletz carte blanche to make a splendid success of the whole affair. The Christmas tree, which was opened to all who had an interest in it at ten o'clock Christmas morning, stood on a pedestal in the center of the hotel lobby. The tree itself was thirty feet in length and when placed on its base the topmost boughs rose above the level of the second floor.

There was a "real live Santa Claus" for the youngsters and two hundred and fifty colored lights added to the beauty of the scene. In decorating the tree, 6,000 feet of red festooning, 1,800 feet of silver tinsel and 500 ornaments were used, every one pretty and made to fit in a particular place.

Seven hundred presents were tucked away among the green foliage of the tree and every hotel employee on the pay roll was remembered and made glad. The arc lights above the lobby floor were just as gaily festooned as was the tree itself and from the glass roof were blowers spreading snow over Santa Claus and his surroundings, the whole thing being so realistic as to bring delighted gasps from the children.

In addition to the tree and "Ole Santy" there was a Punch and Judy show, trained monkeys from one show wintering in San Antonio, trained parrots from another and a trained pony from another. These were all made to perform for the ben-



efit of the children as well as their elders. The dinner for the showmen was held in the banquet hall and in the main dining room hung a Christmas bell ten feet tall, decorated with holly and smilax. An orchestra hidden behind flowers and festooning made music throughout the day.

At a regular meeting of the Showman's League of America, held at the Hotel Saratoga Wednesday night, December 10th, it was decided to hold a grand ball and review at the Hotel Sherman, Chicago, March 4, 1914. Edward Marsh was appointed chairman of entertainment committee and has the preliminary arrangements well in hand. He has already received letters from many prominent theatrical celebrities who will be in Chicago at that time and will provide their services. According to Chairman Marsh, a most energetic advertising campaign will be pursued and the occasion should prove a great success.

John Beck, twenty-four-hour man of Sells-Floto Shows, has arrived at the Wellington in Chicago and is "swapping" yams with the bunch. He says: "In 1890 [1889 or earlier] I was struggling along with my twenty-car circus, and was having opposition with Ringling Bros., who were still on wagons. I say opposition, but there was not much, for I was not strong enough financially to buck them. As I had a poor staff and had rain and mud all through the south. I did not want the opposition, but my agents and assistants all wanted to 'fight,' against my judgment. They didn't dodge any wagon show. In fact, they were not afraid of any of the big shows. At Meridian, Mississippi, Chas. Ringling came on to witness my parade, as his show followed us there. He had some strong opposition bills, so I hunted him up and explained to him it was not my desire to have opposition with them, but that my contractors had got me into the unwilling fight; and at my afternoon show I gave their show a fine announcement. Our business was very poor and I know Charley R. saw the picture of despair on my countenance and general make-up. As we were walking through the menagerie, he discovered a little colt, which he seemingly took a

fancy to, and asked me what I would take for him. As I needed money very badly I told him he could have him at his own price, and immediately he said: 'I will give you \$150 for him.' I said, 'Why, Charley, that is more than he is worth.'

"But he insisted it was worth that to him and gave me the money. I then saw it was an excuse to help me out. We then took the pony over to a livery stable to be taken care of until their show came. I then went back to hotel where Mr. Ringling was stopping, went up to his room and there discovered all the opposition handbills under the bed. He had never put one out.

"The little pony was a big favorite with the Ringling railway show all these years, until December 10, when I received a letter from Mr. Charles saying that Pony Spider (the pony) was dead, but he had served the big show for twenty-three years."

#### January 10, 1914

In the early days of show business, before traveling by rail was even dreamed of, one of the most important positions around the show was that of a good advance agent. One of the best men in those days in the business was a man by the name of Dingess, familiarly known among show people all over the country as "Bob" Dingess. Bob Dingess probably knew more about the country and the conditions from California to Maine than anyone in the business, at least up to that time.

Bob Dingess was one of the early advance agents for Adam Forepaugh and remained there until the time of his death. And although for some time before his death he was not an active worker with the show, yet it was always said that he was never taken off the payroll. Along in the early seventies when the Forepaugh show traveled by wagon all over the

United States, Bob Dingess, during the winter months, would travel hundreds of miles looking over conditions of the country and picking out what he thought would be the best for the coming season. When the show was ready to take the road in the spring, Bob Dingess was satisfied that he knew the country and the conditions where the show would be able to do the best business. If part of the country had been eaten up by grasshoppers the year before, or there had been drought or anything of the kind that would put the country in a bad condition, Bob Dingess always knew it and always looked for conditions that were the best.

Bob Dingess at times was cranky and not an easy man to get along with at all times, yet he was a tireless worker and knew his business from A to Z. Many years later, in my time with the show, I have often sat in the ticket wagon and heard him and Adam Forepaugh in a heated discussion as to the country and conditions and as to where the show should go. I think nine times out of ten, old Bob would win out and show Mr. Forepaugh where he was surely mistaken as to conditions which he had looked into thoroughly. For a man to remain the years that Bob Dingess did in the Adam Forepaugh show was recommendation enough that he was high class in his business.

Another high class man in the wagon show days was George K. Steele. Mr. Steele was not only good in his business, but a high class gentleman. Many of the older businessmen in Janesville will recollect Mr. Steele, for he was advance man for Burr Robbins for several years. Mr. Steele not only kept well posted in the conditions of the country and mapped out for the coming year his course for the show during the winter, but anywhere George K. Steele did business with people, they were always glad to have him come back, for he never made a promise to the public that he did not make good.

Along about '80 Adam Forepaugh was attracted to the good work that Mr. Steele had been doing for Mr. Robbins for years and he was called to Philadelphia and given the same





position with the Forepaugh show that he had held several years with Burr Robbins. In those days an up-to-date advance agent meant more to a show than it does today, for it was before the days of the telephone and telegraphic communications which were far different from what they are today. In those days in many parts of the country you would simply have to take a train and go and find out for yourself the conditions, while today all such news is practically brought to your office.

I am going to tell you something about a trio of brothers by the name of Webb, who started in the show business in the early '70s and made it their life work. Judd Webb, the older brother, and James, the second, were with the Barnum and the Adam Forepaugh shows for many years. Judd Webb was master of transportation for Adam Forepaugh all the years that I was with the show and was considered as high class as any man in the business. By the way, these boys were nephews of the late James A. Webb of this city, who conducted a jewelry store for many years in the corner of what was known in those days as the old Lappin Building.

Jim Webb, the second brother, was boss canvasman and a very valuable man with the show for he had spent some years of his early life as a sailor and knew all about making and repairing canvas. No difference how badly a tent might be damaged in case of a blow down, Jim Webb and his assistants could always repair it and put it in shape as good as new.

Not more than ten or twelve years ago the Ringling show was showing at Spring Brook. The day before, fire had destroyed part of the big horses' tent. I drove down to the grounds in the morning; and driving along the Beloit Road, not more than twenty feet from the road, sat old Jim Webb with a couple of assistants repairing this horses' tent. I had not seen Jim for more than fifteen years. As he was sitting with his back to the road, he did not notice me, but I knew him in a minute.

I had a friend with me who asked me how the fire happened. I knew that Jim Webb had charge of the horses' tents and said to his friend so that old Jim could hear it, that the

tents were probably left in charge of an incompetent man who had neglected his business and possibly they caught on fire in that way. Old Jim thought he knew the voice and turned around.

When he saw who it was, he said, "Dave, if there's room in the buggy for me, I'll go up town with you, for I have not been on the four corners in Janesville for twenty-five years and I want to take a look at the corner where Uncle Jim used to have his jewelry store and have a visit with you."

Jim Webb was high class in his business and his services were always sought after; and yet, he was an unfinished piece of furniture, something on the mission style, strong but unpolished.

I think it was along possibly in the middle '80s that Allie Webb, who was much younger than Judd and Jim, branched out in the business. If I recollect rightly, his first work was with the Ringlings. But he grew fast in the business and for something like twenty years he has been the caterer for the entire Ringling show. He has something like eighty men under him, two men who are known with the show as twenty-four hour men, one of them always being ahead and

Peter Conklin, the well known clown. Pfening Archives.



having things all ready on the lot so that the breakfasts can be served in short order after the show arrives in town. Allie Webb is known the country over among show people as being the highest class caterer in show business and every day serves something like 3,000 meals to employees of the show. And the Ringlings, their assistants, and all the working men are seated daily in their respective places in Allie Webb's cook tent.

Allie Webb has a family, consisting of a wife, two daughters and a son who live in a comfortable home of their own in the suburbs in the southwest side of Chicago. There at his home he has an office where he makes all his plans and hires his people for the coming season. Mr. Webb employs between eighty and one hundred men during the summer. Few hotels in the country serve better meals the year round than can be had at Webb's cook tent with the Ringling show.

A few days ago I had a letter from an old clown named Pete Conklin, whose home is in St. Louis. Thirty-five years ago he was one of the best known clowns in the country. In those days the clown had to be a good dresser and considered a good singer. As he was the principle clown with the Burr Robbins show in '78, which was my first year in the business, he made a good impression on me and a few of his little jokes I have never forgotten. Along about the middle of the performance Pete would come out and mount the platform and sing one of his songs and when he had finished, he would say, "Ladies and Gentlemen, this song with many others you will find in the old clown's song book, and the gentlemanly agents will pass among you offering them for sale at the very low price of ten cents. These song books are sold for the benefit of an old hen and a small brood of chickens, and I am the rooster."

Whether Pete had any other jokes to tell other than this, I am not certain, but this one he told every afternoon and night. Possibly it took better with the crowd than any of the rest. While Pete Conklin is still living, he has been out of the business for some years and must be hanging around the seventy-five mark.

Another man, especially with the



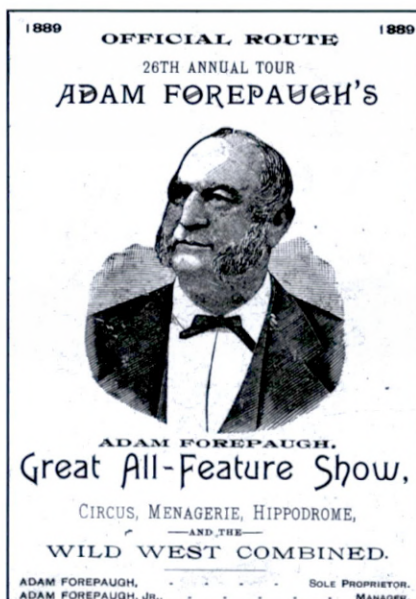
big shows, that was always in demand was a good side show talker and announcer. A man that with a good voice could talk all day long and make a good opening in front of the side show and also could announce the concert with voice enough so that it could be heard in the mammoth tent. That kind of a man was always in demand and at a good salary, his pay always running anywhere from \$50 to \$100 a week.

Thirty years ago two of the best men in the business were Frank Morris of New York and Dan Green of St. Louis. Dan Green died at his home in St. Louis many years ago, but Frank Morris, I think, is still living, but out of the business. These men had fine appearances and could talk from morning till night and this made them valuable in the business.

#### January 17, 1914

To show you that people in circus business keep an eye out for investments of the right sort on the outside, I am going to tell you something about an investment that the Ringlings have made of some magnitude in the far off state of Montana on the main line of what is known as the new St. Paul to the Coast. Along somewhere in the middle of the state is a town on the main line known as Ringling. This town was named after the famous Ringling brothers and from it a branch about twenty miles in length runs off to the southwest up into the mountains 5,500 or 6,000 feet above the sea level to the famous White Sulphur Springs. There, a few years ago, the Ringlings bought something around 30,000 acres of land, this being their original purchase, and rumor has it that they have added to that until now something like 70,000 acres in this district are owned absolutely by the Ringlings.

At these White Sulphur Springs they built a commodious hotel and John Ringling built him a fine summer home where he and his wife spend more or less of their time during the summer. Without any question, in the near future this will be one of the famous summer resorts of the country. This large tract of land at one time was supposed to be what was known as the dry district, yet



Cover of the 1889 Adam Forepaugh route book. Pfening Archives.

thousands of acres of the best hard wheat and flax are being raised there successfully every year.

Just what disposition the Ringlings will finally make of this large tract of land is not known, but it is expected that later it will be cut up into farms and sold to settlers. It is said that a large part of the stock in the short line road running to these famous springs is owned by the Ringlings and they are named among the directors of the road.

You can readily see that the investment of the Ringlings in this particular part of Montana will amount up into several hundred thousands of dollars. This may in the near future become as famous all over the country as is the famous 101 Ranch of Miller Brothers.

A few days ago, through the courtesy of T. B. Russell of this city, who at that time was treasurer of the privileges of the great Adam Forepaugh show, I was handed what was known around the show as the route book of the season. This is the only copy that I have ever seen which gave all the particulars of the season's work since I have been out of the business. It gives all of the details of the workings of the show from the opening in the spring until the close in the fall; the names of all the people connected with the show; number of miles traveled; accidents that occurred, in fact, a detailed

account of the season's work, a part of which I will give you in this letter:

#### Preface

This book contains the entire route of the great Forepaugh show for the season of 1889, giving with accuracy the names of the towns and cities where it has exhibited, the population, state, railroads and distance carefully compiled, and is recapitulated with facts of interest while enroute. The season opened at Philadelphia Monday, April 22nd, and closed Saturday, October 5th, at Alliance, Ohio, making the season twenty-four weeks, one hundred and forty-four days, giving two hundred and eighty-eight performances with four extra performances, one at Detroit, Chicago, St. Paul and Minneapolis. At Ashland, Ky., owing to a flood, the day was lost, and at Brainerd, Minn., only an afternoon performance was given, thus making the grand total performances of the season one hundred and eighty-nine; taking a circuit of thirteen different states, which proved to be one of the most successful and profitable seasons to the only mammoth all-feature show on earth.

Very truly,

JOHN BOYLE

Press Agent Forepaugh's All Feature Show.

Below I will give you a few of the names of the Indians and their squaws, which are unique in themselves, but as they actually appeared on their contracts: Lone Feather (chief), Mrs. Gall-Stones-In-Her Stomach and papoose, Short Horn, Get-No-Horse, Charging Thunder, Scar-In-The-Head, Red Star (chief), Good Elk, Bull Tail, Red Eagle, Shots-In-Head, Lone Elk, Look Bad, Charley-Bad-Eye, Black Eagle, All-Fall-Over-The-Wall, Snake-In-The-Grass, Lone Trail, Charley-The-Scalper, Fleet Foot, Dark Night (chief), Kiowa Bear, Lightfoot, Long Race, Poison Arrow, Many Battle (chief), Crazy Horse, Blood-In-The Eye.

#### Program

Overture--Medley, Prof. George Ganweiler's Military Band. Imposing spectacular entree, in two rings, on the central stage, and Hippodrome track, exhibiting the principle professional features of the Combined Forepaugh and "Wild West" shows.



Realistic illustrations of life in the romantic West.

1. Bucking horses, ridden by Wild Horse Harry, Samuel F. Cody and California Frank.

2. An old-fashioned Virginia reel on horseback by cowboys and Western girls.

3. The pony express, illustrating the manner of carrying the United States mail on the frontier before the advent of the railroad.

4. Scout surprised by Indians and tortured by fire; rescued by cowboys.

5. Lynch law on the frontier; capture and hanging of a horse thief.

6. Race between an Indian afoot and an Indian mounted on pony, later turning stake and return.

7. Reproduction of an historical scene. The attack of Indians on the Deadwood stage coach, with running fight and gallant repulse of scouts and cowboys.

8. Stirring representation of the ever-memorable and sanguinary battle (fought June 25, 1876) between United States troops led by General George A. Custer, and the implacable Sioux, marshaled by the formidable Sitting Bull. Sergeant Chas. C. Wagner, sole survivor of Custer's immediate command, who carried the generals' dispatches to Major Reno on the ill-starred field, appears in this minic encounter, in his old role of the courier. Sensational introduction of Lone Feather, fighting chief of the Ogallala Sioux; Bull Tail, who led the final assault that annihilated Custer, and other savage survivors of that historic horror.

Custer's Last Rally; or, the Battle of the Little Big Horn! Vividly dramatic reproduction of the ambush, attack, repulse, defeat and death of the chivalric Custer.

Circus Notes Gathered by the Wayside, Incidents, accidents, etc.

The bonanza cities of the season were: Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Charleston, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul, Minneapolis, Omaha, Lincoln, Topeka, Wichita, Springfield, Mo., Kansas City, St. Joe, Des Moines, Keokuk, Cedar Rapids, Marshalltown, Ottumwa, Springfield, Ill., Bloomington, Danville,

Frankfort, Ind., Kokomo, Muncie.

Cities where three performances were given: Detroit, Chicago, St. Paul and Minneapolis.

George Johnson, a canvasman, fell from a train near Kansas City, Mo., early on the morning of September 10 and was instantly killed. His remains were buried in Winthrop.

Creston, Iowa proved to be the panicky town of the season. Chariton was also frosty.

The shortest run made was from St. Paul to Minneapolis, 10 miles.

One of the many features was Prof. Ganweiler's superb orchestra which disclosed new and elegant music weekly.

The longest run made was from Staunton, Va., to Charleston, 233 miles.

Total number of miles traveled during the season was 9,398. Average miles per day were 76.65.

Business has been excellent this season, with but little bad weather, and everybody extremely happy.

A miniature cyclone struck the show at Sioux Falls, Dakota and did considerable damage to the canvas on August 19.

While at Stillwater Monday, August 12, many of our people visited the state's prison and had a talk with the three noted Younger brothers, who are each serving a life sentence. Later, September 15, Bob Younger died of consumption.

While enroute from Marshalltown to Oskaloosa on the morning of September 19th, the first section (cage train) parted going down grade at Searsboro, 20 miles north of Oskaloosa, and the engineer in running back to pick up the balance of the cars, a collision occurred, doing considerable damage, telescoping two flat cars, smashing the costly Cleopatra barge, Globe tableau, Eagle tableau, the lion cage, yak cage and many wagons. Two canvasmen were somewhat injured, but not seriously. All of the cars were more or

less damaged. Cause of accident, sleepy brakeman. Loss to show estimated at \$15,000.

On the evening of September 7, while the show trains were being transferred from the Gulf road to the Missouri, Kansas & Texas, in order to reach the show grounds, the tracks were wrenched from under one of the cars, causing a wreck, by which several cages containing lions, tigers, hyenas and leopards were broken to pieces. The animals escaped from their cages, causing considerable excitement all over the city. Men formed in companies and surrounded them and succeeded in recapturing all but one jaguar which escaped to the woods on Grand river, four miles south of town. The accident caused a delay of two or three hours in the parade and the performances, which were witnessed by fully 15,000 people. Later the jaguar was captured, but died on arriving at the show, September 14.

During the parade at Kansas City Monday, September 8, the large bandwagon containing Prof. Ganweiler's Military Band overturned at the corner of Ninth and Broadway and all of the musicians were more or less injured. Louis S. Taylor, a young man of Thompson, Conn., and who plays the trombone, had a knee cap and his left leg below the knee, broken by striking the curb. Besides this he was considerably bruised about the hip and back. Jacob Ganweiler, the clarinet player, had a shoulder dislocated and an arm fractured. He went home to Quincy, Ill. F. A. Warren, whose family lives at Adrian, Mich., had his right shoulder dislocated. He also received cuts and bruises about the face and head. Harry Baxter, cornetist, whose home is in Warrentwon, complains of internal injuries. Warren and Taylor, the two men who received the worst injuries, were taken to the Sisters' Hospital.

Special Agent Semon received orders from Mr. Forepaugh to see that the men received the best of rare and treatment at Mr. Forepaugh's expense.

January 24, 1914

This being the





twenty-fourth anniversary of the death of my old friend and employer Adam Forepaugh, I think it due him that I should say a few words regarding this grand old man, and to me there was none better. I have spent many hours at different times visiting with him when we would be alone in the ticket wagon. Many times he would ask my advice about different matters pertaining to the show.

One evening I said to him when I thought him rather inquisitive, "Governor, why do you ask my advice about different matters pertaining to the show for I cannot recollect of your ever using any of it?"

The old gentleman smiled and said, "Well, Dave, I was in hopes that at some time you might tell me something that might be of value to me."

In the show business he was known as the "single out" show man, meaning by that that he ran not only the big show but his privileges himself. In almost thirty years of his life in the show business, he never had a partner. He was sole owner and manager and built up from a small beginning one of the largest, if not the largest, show on earth. While P. T. Barnum had many partners in different years. And it is true at different times the feeling between the two was very bitter. Each spent hundreds of thousands of dollars fighting for supremacy in the business. While Mr. Forepaugh surrounded himself in all his different departments with able lieutenants, paying liberal salaries, yet no one ever owned a dollar of stock in the Adam Forepaugh show. To me he was the grand old man of



Samuel Gumpertz, John Ringling's friend. Pfening Archives.

all, and all I can say at this time is, peace to his wishes.

Twenty-four years ago today, when his death was announced all over the country, the following evening a private car left Chicago with twenty-five people for Philadelphia to attend his funeral, which was held Jan. 27. I was to be one of the party but sickness in my family kept me at home. The funeral was one of the largest ever held in Philadelphia and hundreds of old employees were there to pay their last respects to their best friend.

A few days ago a friend of mine who had been spending some time in Springfield, Ill., returned home and

Capt. Ed Bogardus and his family appeared with the Forepaugh show. Pfening Archives.

handed me a card and asked me if I ever knew that gentleman. The card bore the name of Edward O. [or "G"] Bogardus. Ed Bogardus was one of the famous Bogardus family, five in number, and they were one of the features of the great Forepaugh show from '84 to '87. The family consisted of Capt. A. H. Bogardus and four sons, all of them famous shots, not only in this country, but in Europe as well. Their home at that time was in Lincoln, Ill. When Capt. Bogardus and his four sons would step into the hippodrome track to commence their shooting the glass ball in the air, the ovation that they would always receive was certainly a high compliment. The Bogardus family were not only fine in their business, but all high class gentlemen and the kind you would always be glad to introduce as your friends.

Henry, the youngest one, still wearing knee breeches and just entering his teens, was certainly at that time the greatest boy shooter in the world. "Hen," as he was always known around the show, was always the last one to step out into the ring. When the boy would break three glass balls in the air at one time before they struck the ground, the ovation that he would receive put a smile on his face that was lasting.

I was certainly pleased to receive the card from Ed Bogardus, for it was the first word that I had received from any of them for twenty-five years and it reminded me of many pleasant associations with the Bogardus family.

Word comes from New York, dated Jan. 10, of the arrival of the Lusitania bringing Sam Gumpertz and Mr. and Mrs. John Ringling back from their trip to Europe yesterday. The big circus man hurried on to the winter quarters of the Barnum & Bailey show in Bridgeport, Conn. where active preparations are advancing for opening the big Madison Square Garden engagement of the big show on March 20.

Mr. Gumpertz was interviewed at his office on East Forty-second Street this morning. He told briefly of his five weeks' trip, which included a tour to Austria, Hungary, Germany, Belgium and Great





Britain. On the continent Mr. Gumpertz made a successful search for "freaks" to stock his 10-in-1 "pit" shows.

While abroad he consummated a partnership arrangement with Otto Heinemann to travel with an American "freak" show on the continent. The show will be displayed under a 300-foot big top and the front will be a reproduction of Mr. Gumpertz' Dreamland front in Coney Island. His plans for the reconstruction of Dreamland before the regular opening of his Coney Island season, May 10, include the restoration of the Surf Avenue side of the property to practically its condition before the fire.

Mr. Gumpertz has leased 400 feet on Surf Avenue, extending 200 feet toward the beach. The Coney Island throngs were mighty good to Mr. Gumpertz last season, his big "pit" show being the biggest clean money maker on the island. The crowds were almost continuously on a capacity order from morning until midnight, and everybody who saw his exhibition seemed to go away and send others back to get the big money's worth he furnished.

Coney Island treated him so well that Mr. Gumpertz is going to put some of his profits back into the embellishments of the resort. His plans for rebuilding Dreamland contemplate the investment of \$200,000, and when completed there will be concessions of all sorts, amusement devices and the biggest "pit" show ever seen on the American continent. The feature of the New Dreamland will be a village of 150 Somalis from central Africa. These strange people have never been seen on the continent. Their skin is black as ebony, and long, bushy hair projects from their heads. Their teeth are white as alabaster, and to keep them so, the Somalis are continually polishing them with pieces of roots that grow in their country. Mr. Gumpertz will bring native doctors and merchants with the Somalis to treat them and provide the nourishment they are accustomed to at home. Native school teachers will come to instruct their children, and in every way the original conditions which surround them at home will be employed to make their trip to America as comfortable

and safe as possible.

During his trip Mr. Gumpertz signed up some rare specimens of freakdom. One man weights 804 pounds. There are two men over 8 feet tall, one of them 8 feet 5 inches, and the other only three inches shorter. Lionel is the name of the "dog-faced" boy. He brings to pale the fame of "Jejo." And there are other freaks, including a French woman who though armless, plays the piano with her toes and does wonderful things with her trilbies. These freaks will be the headliners of Dreamland's Pit show. While Mr. Gumpertz plans in detail are fully matured, he is not ready to announce everything he intends to do in re-establishing Dreamland. But those who know Sam Gumpertz, and that includes everybody in showdom, may safely be assured that he is now undertaking one of the biggest enterprises in his whole career of great accomplishments.

#### January 31, 1914

In making a brief review of the circus and circus people for the last half century, and men that not only made themselves famous in the business but also made millions of money, there is one thing peculiar about it all and that is that in but one instance were there any sons left after the passing of the old generation to perpetuate the names of the great shows that were famous for so many years.

At the time of Adam Forepaugh's death when the will was opened, it read that the show must be sold to the highest bidder for cash and the proceeds equally divided between the widow and son. And of all the men in the business who was, as the saying would go, "always on the job," Adam Forepaugh was probably the closest student to his work of any of them. In all the years that I was with the great show, there were not more than three days that Adam Forepaugh was away from the show,

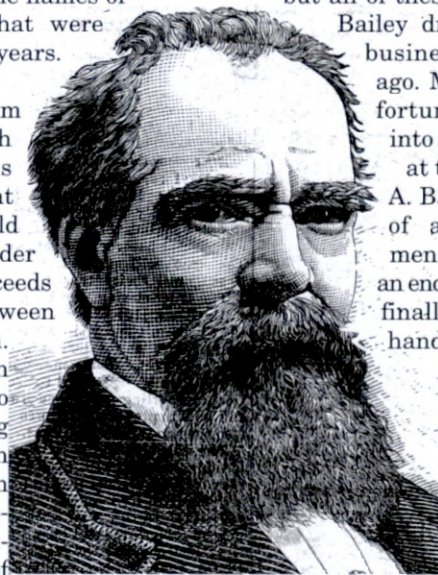
and it was probably less than a dozen times that he failed to count up the tickets from the front door both afternoon and evening.

In his early career in the business when they went overland by wagon, Adam Forepaugh was constantly with the show, driving his own team and within easy reach of any of the bosses in case of an accident of any kind. So that from the beginning of his career in the business up until the time of his death, he was constantly on the watch. While his name was famous the world over and he made millions in the business, there seemed at his death to be little left except millions that he had made. The name of Adam Forepaugh was soon dropped out of the business so far as the world was concerned. Those who knew him best and had traveled with him were about the only ones left to perpetuate the name.

Of all the many partners that P. T. Barnum had from his beginning in the business up until the time of his death, none of these had sons to pick up the life work of the great men who had handled the reins of the great show for so many years. P. T. Barnum had no sons; James A. Bailey had none. At one time there were three Buckley boys from Delavan, Wis. W. C. Cooper, Dan Castello, James E. Cooper, Jim Hutchinson, W. W. Cole, but all of these except James A.

Bailey dropped out of the business many years ago. Most of them built fortunes that figured into the millions, yet at the death of James A. Bailey, the life work of all these famous men seemed to come to an end and the great show finally dropped into the hands of the Ringlings.

John Robinson.  
Pfening Archives.



Uncle John Robinson, as he had been known for many years, of Cincinnati, was a successful circus owner for many years, and he was the only one who left sons to perpetuate the name and carry on the



great show after his death. Uncle John's sons have been running a show for many years and no show in the country ever did better through the southern states than did Uncle John Robinson's.

A few years ago, the Ringlings were billed to show in Cairo, Ill. on September 1, and the story goes that an old darkey was reading the headlines of the billboard at Cairo, and the colored man read the lines in this way: "Ringling Brothers' Greatest Show on Earth, 'Sept 1." The old colored man smiled and said: "I knows what the I is--Uncle John Robinson. I guess these Ringling boys are all right for they're willing to acknowledge that they're the greatest show on earth 'cept 1, and that must be Uncle John Robinson's."

Uncle John Robinson's was one of the first shows after the close of the war to visit the south and the first impression that was made on the colored people after they were out of bondage and able to pay their own way and go to a circus was a lasting one. Uncle John Robinson's show to this day is a prime favorite all over the southern country.

There were also Egbert and Elbert Howes, twin brothers who at one time were proprietors of Howes' Great London Show, one of the best in the country, and yet neither of these Howes had sons that could have carried on the business.

The Montgomery Queen show was a very fine one in its day, but failed many years ago and was sold out at auction for a very small part of its original cost.

There were four of the Sells brothers--Eph, Lou, Adam [Allen] and Pete who lived to amass fortunes and build up a great show, and yet today there is no living male heir of one of the Sells brothers. At the death of the last one, the show was sold at auction in Columbus, O., passing into the hands of the Ringling brothers and James A. Bailey of the Barnum show and afterwards was consolidated by the Forepaugh, and for a few years toured the country under the name of Forepaugh & Sells with Al Ringling as sole owner and manager.



The staff of the Jones Bros. and Wilson Circus. Pfening Archives.

So of all the great shows that have been built up in the last half century, they have all passed into the hands of the Ringling brothers and been consolidated with their show and with the Barnum and Bailey. It will not be long until the names of these great shows that were famous for many years will be almost forgotten. When I look back to the years that I spent in the business, it almost seems like a dream to me, for all the old managers that I worked for and knew so well years ago have crossed over the divide.

A new show is being organized by the Jones brothers and Harry Wilson which will be an interesting and high class show for the coming season. While they will run in but one train, it will be different, and many Janesville people will be interested to know that Harry Wilson, who had the famous den of performing lions here with the carnival company last summer, is one of the partners. The *Billboard* of last week has the following to say about the makeup of the new show: New York, Jan. 12, A deal of interest is being evinced in circus circles here owing to the news of the new amalgamation of the Jones brothers, of J. Augustus Jones fame, with Harry G. Wilson, one of the best side show managers in the country and for many seasons identified with the Pawnee Bill show, Miller Bros. 101 Ranch, Buffalo Bill show and lately with the Two Bills show.

The rumor states that the new combination will represent a twenty-car show, carrying big top, menagerie, side show and some smaller tented attractions.

The *Billboard* representative was

able to obtain an interview with J. Augustus Jones and Harry Wilson during which the former said: "We have not yet laid down all of our plans, but we have decided that our show will not exceed one full train of cars. The policy of the entertainment will be strictly circus with a big feature menagerie of more than 150 wild beasts and specimens of rare foreign animals. Our program will be constructed

along entirely original lines in which trained wild animal features will predominate. We will carry a novel spectacle and will give daily street parades for which we have conceived several new ideas and features. We hope to be able to open our season some time in April or early in May, and we are confident that we will be able to offer the public something away from the ordinary run of tented railroad aggregations."

The shows will be billed as the Jones Brothers & Wilson and the combination seems a particularly appropriate one inasmuch that all parties concerned are showmen of tried and proven experience. J. Augustus Jones will have charge of the advance, and there are few men better qualified for the task.

Mr. Jones and Mr. Wilson were seen at the Brooklyn docks to attend to the unloading and delivery of several cases of wild animals which arrived at the Erie Basin from Singapore per the British S. S. Calcutta.

Col. Cody and F. G. Bonfils were callers in Chicago while on their way from Denver to Washington, accompanied by Gen. Nelson A. Miles, Gen. Baldwin and Gen. Charles King, to exhibit the Indian war moving pictures recently made in the far west to the government officials in the national capitol. Col. Cody and his conferees are enthusiastic over these pictures which they claim eclipse anything ever made in this country in the moving picture line. Col. Cody, as president of the Showmen's League of America, will probably lead the grand march at the ball at the Hotel Sherman in Chicago March 4. Col. Cody is in splendid health and



he anticipates a record-breaking season with the Sells Floto-Buffalo Bill show which is to open at Albuquerque in March.

### February 7, 1914

Some seven or eight years ago a light complexioned, slim built young man was bell boy at the Hotel Myers for some time, and before that he was peddling Chicago papers and the Gazette on the streets in Janesville for a number of years. This boy was always attending to business whether selling papers on the street or as bell boy in the hotel. He never smoked or drank and always took good care that his small earnings went home to the family. It was something like eight years ago, I think, that he tired of this and left Janesville and joined the Buffalo Bill Show. His name is Fred Collier, and one of his boyhood friends, John Connelly of this city, received a letter from him last week from Des Moines, Iowa. He is now assistant to Rhoda Royal, the famous horse trainer who owns and controls more high trained dancing horses, probably, than anyone in the country. He was with the Buffalo Bill Show for several years, where young Collier was his able assistant. Ad in the winter time they showed in the large theatres.

Rhoda Royal's indoor circus, savoring of the good old Summer time and the sawdust rings, proved a vaudeville performance that was unique to a degree at the Odeon Theatre, Des Moines, Iowa, last Thursday night. The audience was of very fair sized proportions, and was pleased immensely.

The program includes the usual circus stunts of the rings, with trained horses featured. The horses are equal to any circus ring stock, and, in fact, are circus horses which perform each summer with the Sells-Floto show. Performing ponies, dogs and monkeys also add to the variety of the program. An exhibition of rope spinning and lassoing by "Freddie" Collier, late of the Buffalo Bill Show, is very clever. An exhibition of cowboy, Indian and Cossack rough riding and bronco "busting" is shown to advantage. Mrs. Royal introduced her bridleless high-school mare, Nellie, in a series of stunts.



And other equine features were the tango horse; Mlle. Alvina displayed to advantage Bismarck, a beautiful cream-white horse, in statue pose; a trick donkey and a kicking mule which "any member of the audience" is privileged to ride if he can, we also shown.

Young Collier used the same good judgment in show business that he did in selling his papers and acting as bell boy in the hotel. He was always there attending to business, saved his money, and was always a gentleman. Today he is reaping his reward, for he is one of the highest salaried men around the show and one that the management is proud of. He has been with Mr. Royal between four and five years, and when Mr. Royal is called away from the show for a few days, he knows that Fred Collier will look after the business the same as though he were there himself.

Of all the busy places in the country about this time of year is the headquarters, or winter quarters of the big shows, for some time next month most of the big shows will make their bow to the public for 1914--the Barnum Show at Madison Square Garden, the Ringlings at the Coliseum in Chicago, the Gollmars at the Amphitheatre in Milwaukee, and the Sells-Floto and Buffalo Bill Show in Mexico.

The following from New York will give you something of an idea of the loyalty of the Wisconsin showmen to their country when it comes to refitting the shows for the coming season: New York, Jan. 27. The Barnum and Bailey Circus has made announcement of the completion of all arrangements for the presentation this spring in Madison Square Garden and during the road tour which follows of a new pageantry spectacle, succeeding "Cleopatra," which was the prelude to the circus arenic performance last season. The production will be an "all American"

offering. All English and European bids for scenic effects, properties, costumes, and other varied equipment were east aside, the contacts for every part and parcel of the spectacle were entrusted to New York and various other cities of this country.

The production will enlist the services of 1,250 persons and will introduce a ballet and singing chorus of 400 girls. Twenty-seven hundred costumes are being made in this city. Participating will be forty elephants, thirty-seven camels, teams of royal cart-drawing sacred cattle, and calcades of richly accoutered horses. A unique innovation in sight and sound will be the march around the hippodrome course of 350 persons playing music, the largest body of instrumentalists ever assembled for professional purpose.

Many years ago with Adam Forepaugh Show there was a young man by the name of Patsy Mahar, who from the time he was a boy of seventeen was the assistant trainer to Adam Forepaugh, Jr., both in winter headquarters and on the road during the summer. Patsy had been with the show many years and would always be seen with young Forepaugh going or coming all during the summer or when not at work in winter quarters would often be seen with him driving in Philadelphia.

It was along about the middle eighties that we showed in the town where Patsy had spent his boyhood days. His father worked as a section hand there and was a typical old countryman. Patsy had not been at home for some years, but spent the morning at his old home and gave his people tickets for the show; and he with young Forepaugh rode at the head of the parade that day and the father felt very proud of him until one of the men of the show told him that Patsey some two years before that changed his name from Mahar to Forepaugh and was known all over the country as Patsy Forepaugh.

This did not please the old gentleman, who thought they were telling him the truth and he looked up and said he would rather Patsy had stayed at home and worked on the section than to be gallivanting around the country with a lot of girls without half clothes enough on and



then change his real name for that of Forepaugh.

But when Patsy returned with the parade and took charge of the family, he had to explain to the father that the boys were simply trying to have some fun with him and that such was not the case. This was Patsy's first visit to the old home in twelve years; and in all the double ring performances, while Adam Forepaugh would be working elephants in one ring, Patsy would be working in the other with trained horses, so that he got well up in the business and stayed with the Forepaughs as long as they owned a show.

It was only some three or four years ago that Patsy was killed in the winter quarters of a small show down east by an enraged elephant. And this is not an uncommon fate for the trainers of wild animals.

#### February 14, 1914

Along about the middle of the summer of eighteen and ninety we had something like three weeks of extreme hot weather and the Forepaugh show was drawing big crowds, both afternoon and evening. After about two weeks of hot weather and big business we ran into Buffalo, N.Y., early Sunday morning, where we were billed to show Monday and Tuesday. Sunday was my settling day and the first thing after the menagerie top was up the ticket wagon was run into the center of the menagerie, so that I might finish the work on Sunday and not be molested by the hundreds of spectators that always visited the show grounds that day.

As we had had a big business during the week I was at the ticket wagon early in the morning to try and strike a balance for the week's business. And after working something like an hour, the balance I got showed that I was about \$900 short on the week. This naturally excited me a little so I lit a cigar and rested for a while and wondered whether somebody had reached over my shoulder and taken a bundle of money or whether I had paid out that amount to some one and forgotten to enter it on the book.

In a few minutes I started again from the beginning and put down everything that I could think of and

when I came to try and balance the next time I found that I was about \$1,400 short in place of \$900. I took the book and threw it to the end of the wagon saying that \$1,400 was not too much; for a man that was fool enough to travel with a circus ought to lose his life and his money, too.

Up to this time I did not suppose that there was anyone in hearing distance, but Mr. Bailey had quietly walked in and sat down to the side of the wagon, and at this moment stepped around to the end of the wagon and said to me: "Dave, I have thought as much myself many a time. Now you are not \$900 short nor \$1,400. Your money is all there, but the big business and the hot weather have been too much for you." He said, "Now I think most of the people have gone to Niagara Falls to spend the day and you just lock up everything and take the train and go to Niagara Falls and spend the day and rest up, and in the morning you will find out that your money on your vouchers will be the ones that you have overlooked; for you have not paid out anything that you did not get a voucher nor have you allowed anyone to get near enough to your safe to take any of the money. It is all there and when you get rested up it will be easy for you to find it."

I took his advice, spent the day at Niagara Falls and up into the evening, and about 9 o'clock the next morning I opened the ticket wagon and in less than twenty minutes I struck a balance that was satisfactory. And of all the men that I ever knew, James A. Bailey was the most considerate of everyone in his employ.

In the spring of '84, a young man who had only been in the newspaper business for a short time applied to the office of Adam Forepaugh in Philadelphia to go out with the show and do newspaper work. His name was Whiting Allen. His home was in

a small town in Ohio. And his experience in the newspaper work up to that time had been very limited. He was given a position back with the show, that of looking after the newspapers in the different towns where we showed.

Allen had something of an idea of himself and thought that next to Mr. Forepaugh he was the one man of importance around the show. He would take possession of anything around the show that looked to him as though it might lighten his work or in any way help him along, never considering the inconvenience that it might be to anyone else.

The end of the wagon, where all the ticket selling was done, was very small and there was only room for a small flat safe and a stool for me to sit on. The show had only been out a few days when Allen commenced to monopolize my end of the wagon, hanging his raincoat or extra clothing of any kind in what was known as my end of the wagon, where he considered them safe. I spoke to him three or four times about it, saying there was no room here and that he would have to find a wardrobe somewhere else, and I didn't even have room for my own overcoat or extra clothing. Allen paid no attention to me; and one day received a double breasted Prince Albert suit of clothes or black worsted, and immediately brought them into my end of the wagon and hung them up. We were showing on the edge of town on a small lot which necessitated standing my wagon outside of the lot on the public highway.

When I got into the wagon and found Allen's suit hanging there I took it down and took it out into the road and laid it lengthwise across the driveway; and after a few teams had driven over them, one of the boys with the show rescued the suit and took it to Mr. Allen. After visiting the ticket wagon and saying many unkind things to me, he said: "I will have something to say in the newspaper tonight about the fresh young man who steals tickets with the show."

I told him that up to this time I had received little notoriety in the business and if he could only say something about me it would certain-





ly suit me, no matter whether it was complimentary or not.

But Allen found a new place for his wardrobe, and after a time we became friends. And from his start in the newspaper work in the spring of '84 he never quit the business up to the time of his death, about two years ago. His services were always in demand at a good salary with any of the large shows. He was a man that never drank and always attended to his work.

In the years that I was with the Forepaugh show there were perhaps six or seven of what were known as "old timers" in the business who in years gone by had made fortunes and been famous all over the country. But these men for many years had been down and out, yet they would occasionally come on and stay three or four days or a week, and beg to Adam Forepaugh to put a show together and start them on the road again. All these men knew that Mr. Forepaugh built all his cars, cages, baggage wagons, in fact everything in his winter quarters that went to make a high class show, and that there were more or less good second hand wagons of all kinds and a few cars and harnesses in the winter quarters that never were taken out in the summer. And while these men had been down and out for as many as twenty years in so far as the outside world was concerned and failure was written all over them, there was one thing about them and that was they never had lost their courage. They still thought that if they had another show on the road that people would recollect the name and know that there was a good show coming or their name would not be a headliner. While Mr. Forepaugh would listen to them and urge them to stay longer as his guests, yet they never talked him into the idea of putting out a show; and when they came to go away, Adam Forepaugh would always bring them to the ticket wagon and tell me to give them \$300 or \$500; and I never knew him to give one of these men less than \$300, and while they needed the money badly. It did not look much to them, for their ambition was to get a show on the road. To the average man who is broke and down and out, \$300 or \$500 would look like



a lot of money; yet it did not seem to mean much to these men.

One of them in particular, whose name I will not mention, was 71 years old at the time and yet he insisted to Mr. Forepaugh that his name was a power from California to Maine and that all he needed was a nice little bright show that he could take on the road and that he was just as capable then to manage such a show as he was in his palmiest days; that he was certain he could go out and make a fortune in one season. But Adam Forepaugh gave him a pass back to his home and \$500 in money. But this did him but little good, for he had hoped in the near future to have a show on the road of his own. While each of these men in their turn had received a knockout blow, they were ready and anxious to go back and try again.

Hundreds of people who attend the moving picture shows all over the country have but little idea of how the pictures are taken or the dangers some people have to go through to have real pictures of the wild animals which are many times seen in the better class houses. The will give you an idea of one actor's narrow escape:

"Southern Pathe players are having an exciting time of it at the St. Augustine studio, according to reports. Walter Seymour, the leading man, has had several narrow escapes and is convinced that animal features, from the actor's standpoint, are eminently no good.

"One of these experiences while taking a scene in the arena in which he was being chased by a tiger. Although the scene was well timed, Seymour lost his footing and fell, with the tiger on his back. Although the trainers drove off the brute just in time, the leading man's face was badly cut in falling against the bars,

and the tiger's claws cut him in the side."

#### February 21, 1914

Many years ago with the Forepaugh show there was a pair of midgets—Major John Mertz and his wife. This couple were supposed to be the smallest married couple in the world, but they were bright and smart and both were well educated and interesting people to converse with. Their work at that time was in the side show; but as an extra attraction in the evening they, with other side show attractions, were brought into the big top and introduced as extra features to the concert after the big show was over.

Their home was in Salisbury, N.C., where Mrs. Mertz was born and raised. Her maiden name was Nale, and while there were five or six children in the family, all the rest of the children were even of more than ordinary size, three of the brothers standing about six foot tall. Abe Nale, the older brother of the family, and his wife took charge of the side show in which they were exhibited with whatever show they happened to be traveling.

Some years ago the Major and his wife retired from the business and settled down in their old home in North Carolina where the Major has been engaged for some time as a clerk in a drug store. He is the one entertainer of the crowds that gather in the drug store in the evening, telling of his experiences in show business years past.

I heard from them a short time ago and the Major had just celebrated his sixtieth birthday. As they own a comfortable home in Salisbury, this is where they expect to spend the remainder of their days, for the Major declares that they are out of the business to stay. They never traveled with a show that they did not leave a good name and managers were always anxious to get Major Mertz and his wife as an attraction. They occupied a platform in the side show where they sold their pictures to visitors and a crowd of interested spectators could always be seen around their platform.

That they stand well in their home town is evident from the fact that the



Major has a lucrative position in the drug store in his home city. I was very glad to hear from them once more for they were one couple of small people whom I was always interested in.

Last week in a borough of New York was started a lawsuit among Mrs. Bailey's brothers and sisters [over the will of] the late James A. Bailey, who for so many years was partner of P. T. Barnum. In this suit will be involved something like five million dollars.

James A. Bailey for nearly half a century was one of the foremost show men of the world and his life work had but two objects in view--one of building up the largest show in the world for his name along with P. T. Barnum, and the other to accumulate the millions which would naturally go with such an enterprise. As there are but five heirs left to the millions, would you not think that this equally divided would be plenty for all? But this does not seem to be the case and now it will be left to the courts to decide where and to whom the millions will go.

The following from New York will give you the details of the trial, as it was commenced there week before last: New York City, Feb. 7. Approximately \$5,000,000 are involved in the suit filed by the Hutchinson family, contesting the will of the widow of James Bailey, the famous show man, which is now on trial before judge Tompkins in supreme court at White Plains, N. Y. The proceeding opened last Tuesday with the selection of a jury and adjournment for the week was taken yesterday afternoon. Next Monday the case will be resumed with the Hutchinson witnesses still testifying. Probably all of next week will be consumed in hearing the testimony and reaching a verdict. Briefly stated, James A. Bailey left his millions to his widow, Mrs. Ruth Louisa Bailey, who died in Hope Sound, Fla., March 11, 1912. Mr. Bailey had died April 11, 1906, and subsequently Joseph T.

McCaddon (a brother of Mrs. Bailey) had assisted her in administering the estate and served as trustee in operating the Bailey circus interests until they were eventually disposed of--the Barnum & Bailey show to Ringling Brothers and the Buffalo Bill Wild West show to Col. Cody and Major Little. Mr. McCaddon was with his sister when she died, and the suit to break the will is based upon the

assumption of "undue influence." Under the will, Joseph T. McCaddon and Theodore

D. McCaddon (brothers of Mrs. Bailey), Dr. Harper (who married a sister of Mrs. Bailey) and their son, Joseph D. Harper, were chief beneficiaries. Mrs. Anna Isabelle Hutchinson, on

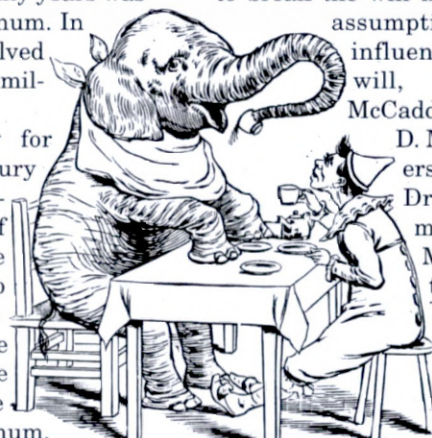
behalf of herself and sons, Fred and Charles, has brought suit to break Mrs. Bailey's will. They were "remembered" in the document and proposed distribution of the estate, but not in amounts to satisfy their ideas of what was equitable and proper under the circumstances. Mrs. Hutchinson and Mrs. Bailey were sisters. Charles Hutchinson is and has been for years treasurer of Barnum & Bailey's circus, and Fred Hutchinson is manager of the Sells-Floto shows for Harry Tammen. It is believed that the McCaddons will offset the premise of "undue influence" with the testimony attempting to show that the Hutchinsons were not in favor with Mr. Bailey and his widow. Witnesses for the contestants heard up to the time the court adjourned yesterday afternoon created a structure with a view of establishing the Hutchinsons' friendly standing with the Baileys, and to show that the McCaddon faction was decidedly not in favor with Mr. Bailey during the latter years of his life and that Mrs. Hutchinson and her sister Mrs. Bailey were on the friendliest of terms. For the Hutchinsons, testimony had been given up to Friday afternoon by Charles and Fred Hutchinson, Mrs. Isabelle Hutchinson (contestant),

Louis E. Cooke, "Tody" Hamilton, F. B. Hatch, George Arlington, John McLaughlin, Ed Schafer, Charles Mercer, Joseph Mayer (the circus program publisher) and John M. Burke (nestor of circus press agents), all of whom had either been in the employ of the late James Bailey or were closely associated with him in a business way or by relationship. Mrs. McGinnis, a sister-in-law of Mrs. Bailey, was also a witness, her husband being a brother of Mr. Bailey, whose family name was McGinnis. Starting Monday noon there will be more witnesses for the Hutchinsons, and when their case is completed, it is presumed that the McCaddon faction will call an extensive list of witnesses to shed light (from the angle of defense) upon the business and family relations of the Baileys, Hutchinsons and McCaddons. The jury has been drawn from a regular panel of farmers in Westchester county, who know nothing of the circus business and who are expected to render their verdict in accordance with the evidence adduced. Visitors to the court during the past week say the jury is an intelligent body of men and representative of the jury system in a substantial rural community. For the contestants, John T. Bottom of Denver, assisted by Arthur M. Johnson of Mount Vernon, are appearing; the McCaddons are represented in court by the New York firm of Holmes, Rogers & Carpenter. Under Mrs. Bailey's will Mrs. Hutchinson is understood to receive an annual income of \$10,000 and the nephews are not individually provided for in any manner.

#### February 28, 1914

Many people in Janesville will recollect Joseph Miller of Miller Bros.' 101 Ranch Wild West, which showed here last summer. It was Joseph Miller who rode the beautiful white horse at the head of the parade and also headed the grand entry at the opening of the show. He has been the one active manager of the show from the time it was first started and he and his brothers are probably the first showmen in the country to buy out the equipment of an entire army.

"All or nothing, and here's the money on the table, every cent of it





gold," said Joseph C. Miller to the Mexican consul at Marfa, Tex.

Gold money looks good down in that country; and a moment later Miller had bought the entire equipment of the federal army which fled from Ojinaga across the Rio Grande to Persidio, Tex., to escape death at the hands of General Villa and his victorious followers.

Miller believes it is the first time a civilian ever bought an army's entire equipment. There were 5,000 soldiers under General Salvador R. Mercado, counting the odds and ends. The bill of sale given to Miller by the Mexican head consul at El Paso covered everything in the hands of the United States customs officials at Marfa. Miller could not even guess how much or how little he was getting, but he had seen enough horses and mules to lead him to risk what might be called a "sight unseen" trade.

When he succeeds in gathering all the live stock, Miller is confident that he will have 2,000 head of horses and mules. He got about two carloads of saddles with blankets, bridles, etc. There were about 3,500 pistols, four breech-loading cannon, one Gatling gun, and piles of sabers.

These arms are covered by the bill of sale, but Miller is doubtful whether or not he shall take them to Oklahoma since President Wilson has lifted the bars for the transportation of arms to Mexico. But horses and mules by the trainload have begun arriving at Bliss, Okla., and are being turned into the pastures of the Miller ranch.

Zack Miller, who looks after the live stock department of the ranch, was the first to see the opportunity. When news came that the federal army was preparing to cross into the United States, he went south on the first train.

Other ranchmen from Texas, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico were on the ground when Miller arrived. As the demoralized army began crossing the Rio Grande, Miller telegraphed his brother Joe to come and help him.

The fugitive army was in miserable plight. The soldiers were accompanied by their wives, children, and dogs. Many were on foot, ragged and

hungry.

The horses, mules, and burros were this and starved; but all were heavily loaded with camp plunder. Many reeled and staggered as they were prodded along under the weight of their packs. The live stock had been six weeks practically without feed or forage, save the scant picking they could find in the immediate vicinity of Ojinaga.

Presidio, or the border, is seventy miles from Marfa, the nearest railroad point. The, prisoners virtually became prisoners of war and were



Joseph C. Miller of the 101 Ranch Wild West. Pfening Archives.

rounded by the United States army for march to Marfa, where all the army equipment was held for customs duties. The men, women and children at once were abundantly supplied with food by the United States army.

The Millers were the only prospective buyers willing to bid for everything brought with this motley army. The other bidders offered to buy this or that in limited quantities, but this was not to the liking of the Mexican consul at Marfa.

In seventy-nine, with the Burr Robbins show, a man by the name of George S. Cole, whose home was at Pottsdam, N.Y., made a contract with Burr Robbins to run the privileges of the show on a percentage; and while Mr. Cole was what was known as an

old-timer, he was up-to-date, was a money maker and always a money spender. But in the contract Mr. Cole had neglected to make arrangements as to how he was to drive over the road with the wagon and when the show started out Mr. Cole found that he had to drive overland in a carryall drawn by four horses and carrying about fourteen people. This, on account of the heavy load, was one of the first wagons away from the hotel in the morning; and on a long trip it was one of the last ones into town. This kind of transportation was not to the liking of Mr. Cole and the show had not been out so long until he commenced to look around for better transportation.

I had a pair of horses and a top carriage, and was always the last one out of town, as I had to settle all the bills; but would usually, on decent roads, drive ten miles an hour, as I liked to be the first one into the next town. Mr. Cole came to me and asked me if I would object to his riding over the road with me provided he could make satisfactory arrangements with Mr. Robbins. I told him I would be glad to have his company; that any arrangements that he could make with Mr. Robbins would be satisfactory to me.

He finally arranged with Burr Robbins to ride over the road with me and paid him \$10 a week extra to ride on the eighteen hour train.

Mr. Cole had been in the show business for many years and it was hard for him to keep his hands off even though it was outside of his line when he saw anything going on that did not suit him. The first thing I had to do on arriving in town in the morning was to direct the people to the hotel and assign them to their rooms. The contract with the hotel always read that the landlord was to get breakfast at any time that the manager of the show ordered it. I ordered breakfast at 2 o'clock in the morning at one particular hotel and the landlord informed me that there would be no breakfast at his hotel at 2 in the morning and that he had signed no such contract. I tried to reason with him for a minute, but he was excited, talking loudly and fast, when George S. Cole jumped to his feet and locked horns with the land-



lord; and much to the surprise of the landlord, I turned to Mr. Cole and told him in short words where to get off and that he had nothing whatever to do with the show and that I was the manager and when I needed any of his assistance I would call on him.

This rather pleased the landlord, and when he found it was impossible for us to make the next town and have breakfast at a later hour he finally said to me: "I think you and I can get along with this matter in some way and we will try and serve your breakfast at 2 in the morning."

And before the day was over he and I were fast friends.

This was the last season that George S. Cole was with the Burr Robbins show and I did not hear from him until five or six years later, when I received a letter from him asking about the Valentine school of telegraphy. In this letter he stated that he had just received a visit from a rather undesirable nephew and it looked as though he had settled down on him for the winter, but that he had some of the Valentine literature and was thinking some of coming to Janesville to the school.

"This," he said, "looks like the only chance I will have to get rid of him before spring. If you think there is any chance for him to learn telegraphy, I will send him on to Janesville and want you to do the best you can for him."

In a few days the young man arrived and while he had all the earmarks of a back number and was handicapped by a crippled hand, yet he was naturally bright and smart. Mr. Valentine told him that he thought it was a question whether he could learn the business on account of his hand, but that he would put him in the school and give him a trial and, if he could not handle it that he would give him back his tuition.

The young man started in school the next day, and to make a long story short, it was only four or five months till Mr. Valentine had a position for him in the Illinois Central railway and he made good in every position that was given him; and before his uncle George died, the nephew he was so glad to get rid of was ready and willing to make a home for his uncle in his declining

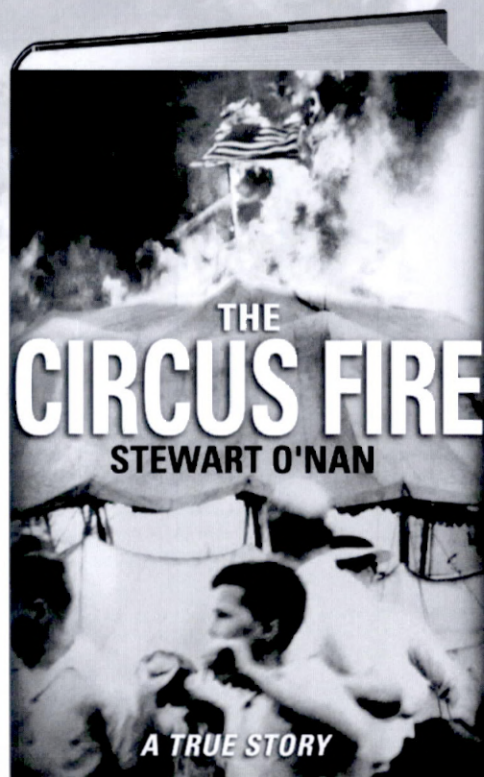
years. And little did George S. Cole think when he sent his nephew to the West to learn telegraphy that he would ever make good and his one object seemed to be to get rid of him.

The young man wrote to me several times; but later he drifted farther away, and it has been many years since I have heard from him. But if he is still living, I will venture to say that he is making good wherever he is.

The Showmen's League of America ball at the Hotel Sherman, Chicago, March 4, promises to be a great success. Novel stunts are being prepared for the entertainment of the hun-

dreds who will attend. Through the courtesy of Harry H. Strouse, a charter member of the league, the Girls of the Follies will give a performance, a la tabloid, in costume. John W. Warren, chairman of the general entertainment committee, is sending tickets for the ball to the members of the league and its friends throughout the country, urging cooperation towards installing permanent headquarters for the league in Chicago. vice-president [Charles] Andress reports splendid progress in securing advertisements for the official program.

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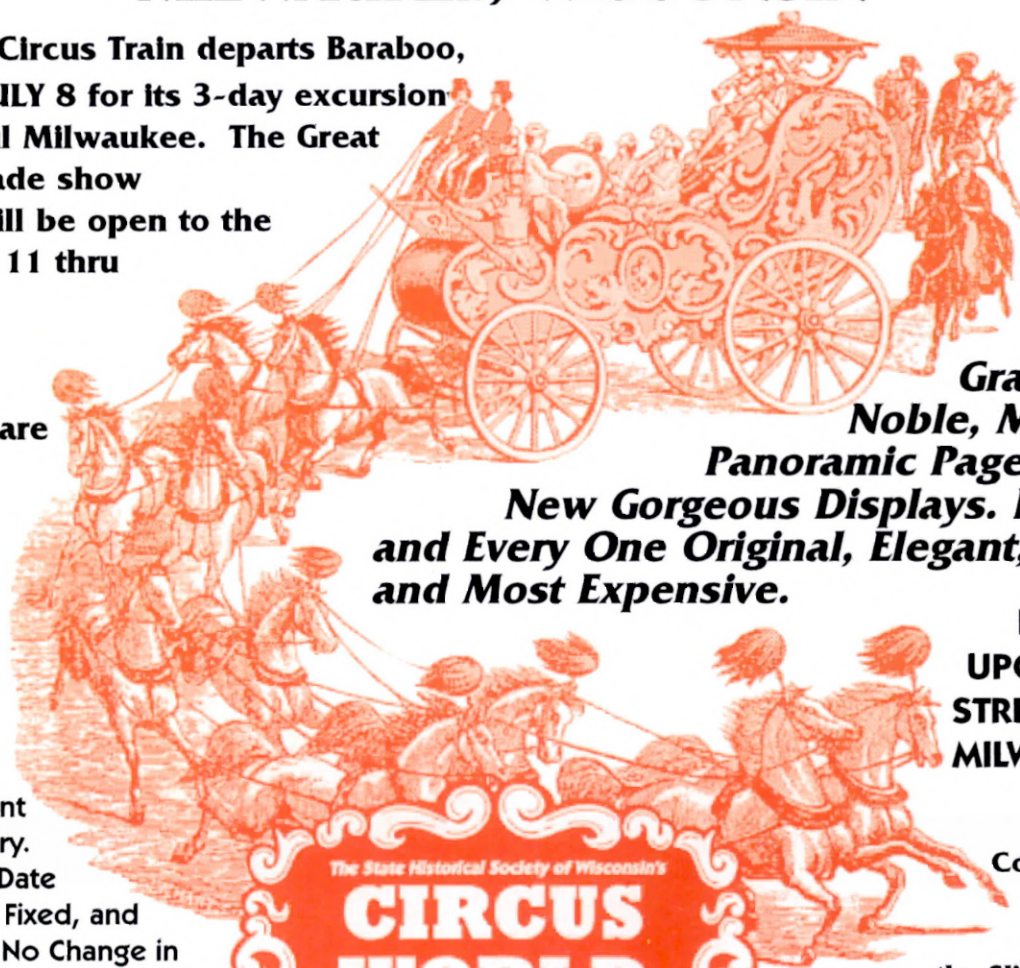
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